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SIR FREDERICK ROBERTS, V.C., G.C.B.

KABUL
TO KANDAHAR

BY

MAUD DIVER

WITH A FRONTISPIECE
AND TWO MAPS

LONDON
PETER DAVIES

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TO THE ABIDING MEMORY OF

Field-Marshal

EARL ROBERTS OF KANDAHAR

V C , K.G., K.P., G C B , ETC

AND TO HIS DAUGHTER

THE COUNTESS ROBERTS OF KANDAHAR,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

His life was gentle; and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world – 'This was a man.'

JULIUS CAESAR

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PRELUDE	13
PHASE I	25
PHASE II	73
PHASE III	139
LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED . . .	189
INDEX	191

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I HAVE refrained from loading this brief record with footnotes and references: but all details are exact, even to spoken words—so far as history can be exact.

The last hours of the Guides, in Kabul Residency, can only be known from hearsay, but I have relied mainly on *The Story of the Guides* by Colonel George Younghusband, C.B. (Queen's Own Corps of Guides) since the writer must have heard all that could be known.

To readers unfamiliar with India's frontier policy, the following epitome statement may help to make my allusions clear.

The 'forward' policy in its widest sense—at the time I write of—implied active control of Afghan affairs, and the sphere of British influence extended right up to the Oxus. The 'backward' school—headed by John Lawrence—saw the Indus as India's natural boundary; and aimed at a 'closed frontier' beyond it, even as regards the whole tribal area. Fight them when

necessary: otherwise, let them be. Between these two extremes, a later school favoured a boundary known as the 'scientific frontier', outlined by Sir Mortimer Durand; British roads, railways, and influence covering the whole tribal area, and aiming at a friendly alliance with Afghanistan, avoiding active intervention or invasion. In fact, the 'forward' policy, in its moderate form, is the recognized Frontier policy to-day.

GUIDE TO PRONOUNCING INDIAN AND AFGHAN NAMES

a = u in 'but'
ā = ar
i = ee
ir = eer
e = ai in 'rain'
in = een
ai = as i in 'vine'
ō = as o in 'note'
u = oo

PRELUDE

PRELUDE

THE story of the Second Afghan War is compounded of ingredients all too familiar in British annals. It is a story of political adventure and misadventure, redeemed by soldierly achievement; of a war reckoned unjust by some, inevitable by others; of a small, fierce independent state wedged between two great acquisitive powers: the eternal Asiatic triangle of Russia, England and Afghanistan.

Since the days of Peter the Great, Russia has aimed at capturing Indian trade, at destroying England's ruling power in Asia; an aim never fulfilled, yet never abandoned to this day.

When the time was ripe for Russia's rapid strides across Asia, England's long trading period in India had passed into a period of war and expansion, that began with Clive and lasted till the time of the Mutiny. By then, she had annexed the Punjab and the Borderland beyond the Indus; while Russia had pushed her Eastern boundary to the frontier of North Afghanistan.

That lawless, fanatical country, always at war with itself, had become—as it was to remain—the traditional corn of wheat between two grindstones: Russia, a dreaded neighbour, England, a would-be ally, whose friendly advances might cloak possessive designs. Its three main provinces —Kabul, Kandahar and Herāt—had been ruled by rival chiefs all steeped in treachery, murder and intrigue, till there rose one man strong enough to weld them into a united Kingdom.

Handsome and virile, a just but iron-handed ruler, Dōst Mahomed Khan was known among his people as the Amir-i-Kabir—the Great Amir. First he conquered his weaker brother, Shah Shujah, who fled to British India for protection; then he pulled his faction-ridden kingdom together and won the allegiance of its quarrelsome chiefs. To establish his power, to check Russo-Persian designs on Herat and Kandahar through a working alliance with Great Britain—such was his sane and politic ambition. Through England's Agent, Alexander Burnes, he made it clear that he preferred British friendship to Russian promises. But it so happened that a new Viceroy had lately arrived in Simla: the cool and cautious Lord Auckland, chosen by the Whigs as ' a safe man '. Like all new Viceroys, he depended, for counsel, on the Simla Foreign Office and a ' forward ' group of secretaries, for whom ' the Great Game ' in Central Asia had become an obsession.

To Dōst Mahomed's genuine bid for friendship he turned a sceptical ear. He would promise nothing. He demanded all. And because Dōst Mahomed would not bind himself unconditionally to so lop-sided an alliance, he was written down 'a hostile chief, harbouring schemes of aggrandisement injurious to the security and peace of India's frontier'—which then lay south of the Punjab! And that was but the prelude. The safe man, unsafely led, called into being the ill-fated 'Army of the Indus'; drove Dōst Mahomed from his throne and proceeded to force upon the Afghan people Shah Shujah, the Undesired—a mere pawn in the 'Great Game'.

From one unprovoked act of injustice sprang disaster on disaster; loss of valuable lives, money and prestige; the massacre of a British army, and the murder of Shah Shujah by his own subjects: a chapter of tragedies, muddles and heroism unequalled in British annals. Followed the crowning irony: a deported Amir solemnly returned to his throne by those who had driven him from it three years earlier; while Russia, unperturbed by the upheaval, bided her time.

But British generosity covers many sins. The Dōst, in banishment, had a handsome pension and a fine house in Calcutta. He had seen British power broad-based on just government: had borne himself throughout with a kingly dignity

and absence of rancour. Only at sight of his capital, half destroyed by Pollock's avenging army—hatred inevitably flared up for a time; and another ten years were to pass before he achieved the alliance he had pleaded for in 1837.

Those ten years saw Russia paramount in Central Asia; England established in the Punjab —ably ruled by John Lawrence, the strong man of his day, who set his face like a rock against any more costly and disastrous Afghan adventures. But in the Sixties Russia swept on again with gigantic strides.: Tashkent, Bokhara, Khokund, Kiva in vain resisted her onset. By '76 her eastern boundary had reached the outlying Afghan provinces, while India's policy was still governed by the ' backward ' school, who saw the Indus as her natural frontier. John Lawrence had been wise in his day; but even the wisest policy must change with changing times. His creed of masterly inactivity could not check the rising tide of Russian activity; and in the Seventies British India awoke to renewed concern for the fate of Afghanistan, no longer held together by the strong hand of its Amir-i-Kabir.[1]

His successor, Sher Ali, resembled him only in a sincere desire to maintain British friendship and follow British counsel. Lord Lawrence—re-

[1] Great Amir.

turned to India as Viceroy—had been good to him. Lord Mayo had helped him with a subsidy; and after Mayo came Lord Northbrook, a man of the 'backward' school, averse from any intervention—friendly or otherwise—in Afghan affairs. To him Sher Ali had appealed for the revision of a certain agreement between Russia and the British Foreign Office; but he had firmly refused to intervene, or even to promise armed help in case of a Russian attack. He had refused to recognize Sher Ali's favourite younger son as heir to the throne. So, in treacherous Afghan fashion, the Amir had seized and imprisoned his true heir, Yakub Khan, and kept him in durance for six years. Rebuffed by the English, he had turned his back on them—like Dōst Mahomed twenty years earlier—and lent a willing ear to the overtures of Russia.

To India, meantime, the swing of the party pendulum had brought a Viceroy of the opposite school, armed with clear instructions to check the designs of Russia and establish closer relations with Afghanistan. In the face of Lord Northbrook's final despatch—urging the wisdom of non-interference, the unwisdom of forcing a British Envoy on Kabul undesired by the Amir—Lord Salisbury bade Lord Lytton lose no time in despatching an envoy to Kabul, 'charged with the task of overcoming the Amir's apparent reluctance', and announcing the arrival of a new

Viceroy anxious to cultivate closer relations with himself and his kingdom.

'So, in April 1876, Lord Lytton landed in Bombay, resolved to abolish the ' closed frontier ', to establish British influence and control from the Khyber to the Oxus.' To achieve these great ends and inaugurate a new Indian era, the man and the hour seemed aptly met together.

For, by the middle Seventies, British dominion in India was at its apex of stability and power. Through the two great periods of trade and expansion, it had passed to the crowning period of Empire and internal progress. It had lived down the shock of the Afghan disaster, the critical strain of the Mutiny. From the hills to the sea there was peace and prosperity, light taxation, little or no internal trouble. The Civil Service was at its zenith of power and prestige. A fine army—British and Indian—kept order within the frontier and could be trusted to repel any attempt at invasion. Only beyond the Himalayas loomed the oncoming menace of Russia. Whether or no that menace was over-coloured by apostles of the ' forward ' school, Lord Lytton had his orders, *plus* his own personal conviction. Accordingly he wrote to Sher Ali proposing a British Agent at Kabul for consultation and advice. But the friendly gesture that would once have been welcome had come too late. The Amir —still smarting from his failure with Lord North-

brook—suspected, not unnaturally, that the new Viceroy was more concerned to safeguard British interests than his own. His tardy answer, polite but discouraging, vexed Lord Lytton and moved him to warn the Amir that by refusing to see a British Envoy he would alienate a friendly power; one that could pour an army into his country before a single Russian soldier could reach Kabul. Round a friendly Amir that army could form a defensive ring of iron; an unfriendly one it could 'break as a reed'.

The veiled threat sprang from Lord Lytton's not unfounded belief that Afghan Amirs were less likely to be influenced by offers of help than by fear of British power to hurt them. Coming in the teeth of fresh overtures from Russia, it must have given Sher Ali furiously to think. For six weeks he left the Viceroy's letter unanswered. Then he wrote briefly, ignoring the proposed mission, offering to send his own Native Agent to Simla that there he might 'learn the things concealed in the generous heart of the English Government'. And if a hint of irony lurked in that last, it was not altogether without reason.

Lord Lytton agreed to receive the Nawab, gave him a courteous hearing, and a list of concessions that would be signed on given conditions. He would recognize Sher Ali's chosen heir, Abdulla Jān; grant him an increased yearly sub-

sidy, and lend him British officers to train his army. But—the Amir, in return, must break with Russia; must accept British Agents at Kabul, Herat and elsewhere, encourage trade with India and give Englishmen the free run of his country. A treaty on these lines he proposed to confirm by a personal meeting; and the Amir was graciously invited to attend the Imperial Delhi Assemblage on New Year's Day, 1877, when Queen Victoria would be proclaimed Empress of India before all the chiefs of her realm.

To these unwelcome proposals Sher Ali vouchsafed no answer till the 'tumult and the shouting' had subsided. Then he wrote, offering to send his most trusted Minister for discussion of the treaty with Sir Lewis Pelly at Peshawar; and there the two men met in an amicable spirit that could not charm away the fundamental opposition of their principals. Their talk resulted in a deadlock. Nor were matters improved by the Afghan Minister's untimely illness and death at Peshawar.

When news of the double disaster—death and failure—reached Kabul, it so mortified Sher Ali that he flew into one of his violent rages, flung invectives at the perfidious infidels, who would never come to terms with him. If they desired war, they should have it. He would raise the whole country against them; every rupee in his Treasury he would hurl at their accursed heads.

So ran the report. True or untrue, the fact remained that Viceroy, Amir and Russian Generals had, between them, sown the dragons' teeth presently to spring up as armed men—precursors of a second Afghan War.

PHASE I

I

In June 1878, Simla was electrified by news of Russian regiments mobilized on the Oxus, a Russian Envoy welcomed at Kabul, as Imperial Ambassador, received in state by Sher Ali and his most powerful Sirdars. The Amir, without warning, had struck a shrewd blow at British pride; but more than pride was involved at that critical moment. For Russia was still at war with Turkey. Five thousand Indian troops had been sent to Malta lest England might feel bound to intervene. And here was Russia's 'retort courteous': regiments on the Oxus and an Ambassador at Kabul. The double challenge left England no alternative but a forward move to find out what was really happening in that far country, where no Russian rival could be allowed to gain a dangerous foot-hold. So Lord Lytton, with the full consent of Whitehall, insisted on the immediate like reception of a British Mission: arrangements to be made with the leading Sirdars for its safe conduct to Kabul.

The move—though aimed at Russia—imposed a hard problem on the Amir. With a rebellious son and a discontented people, with two great countries pressing their claims on him, he might well feel like an earthen vessel between two iron pots. And it so happened that Lord Lytton's unwelcome letter coincided with the death of his favourite son, Abdulla Jān. Personal grief and public mourning provided excuse for delaying a difficult answer, while the Man on the Spot hinted at the awkwardness of jointly entertaining the Agents of two rival powers who were potentially at war.

That argument decided a perplexed Amir against receiving the British Mission. But he still sent no word to India, where all was being arranged for an immediate advance through the Khyber Pass, under General Sir Neville Chamberlain and his chief Political Officer, Major Pierre Louis Napoleon Cavagnari, C.S.I.: a notable personality, half French, half Irish, pleasant-mannered, bearded, with the air of a scholar rather than a soldier, and twenty years of distinguished Border Service behind him. His experience in seven Frontier campaigns, had won him a reputation for handling the Pathan tribes with a blend of firmness and courtesy backed by unfailing personal courage: fine qualities off-set by a mind fatally prone to see men and things as he would have them be; to let desire over-

ride judgment and personal ambition over-ride all.

Such was the man chosen to pilot Lord Lytton's uninvited Mission through the formidable Khyber, monarch among passes, and through a possibly inimical Afghanistan.

On September the 21st the whole party—two hundred troops and a dozen British officers—marched out from Peshawar and encamped at Jamrūd, near the mouth of the Pass. Sir Neville, doubtful of their welcome, sent forward Cavagnari, with Colonel Jenkins of the Guides Corps and a small escort, to interview the General commanding Fort Ali Musjid, and arrange for a peaceful passage through the Khyber. Within sight of Ali Musjid, he was checked by information that Afghan levies barred the Pass. If they advanced they would be fired on.

Cavagnari answered coolly that they would continue to advance till they *were* fired on; and his resolute tone took effect.

A meeting was arranged beside the stream that flows beneath the fort-crowned mass of rock: Cavagnari, with Jenkins, a few Guides and native gentlemen; Faiz Mahomed with a following of some sixty troops. And while they talked, fresh Afghans kept casually strolling up, till the little group was enclosed in a wall of armed men.

The General, courteous but unbending, stated his sovereign's orders: a British Mission could

not be allowed to pass unchallenged through the Khyber. In vain Cavagnari argued that they came on a peaceful errand, to confer with The Amir in a spirit of friendship.

The word roused Faiz Mahomed to sudden anger.

'Friendship? *Wah-illah!* Who knows the heart of the British Government? Your people come here without invitation; bribing the Amir's servants to give them passage; setting Afridi against Afridi—and calling themselves our *friends*...!'

An uneasy murmur from the crowd warned Cavagnari not to risk brave men's lives in further vain argument.

'Discussion is useless,' he said sauvely. 'We are both Government servants acting under orders. I ask only one question—If the Mission advances, will you oppose it with force?'

And Faiz Mahomed answered straightly, 'With all the force at my command. It is only because of former friendship that I do not shoot you all now for what your Government has done already'.

On that amicable declaration of war, they shook hands: the advanced guard of the Mission rode back to Jamrúd—rebuffed.

Whether or no a deliberate insult had been intended was a question that only Sher Ali could answer: and insult or no, the Jamrúd episode

sealed his doom. In Lord Lytton's view he had forfeited all claim to further friendly advances.

While a formal demand for explanation and apology sped to Kabul, troops were massed for a triple advance through the Khyber, the Kuram Valley and the Quetta route to Kandahar. That demand, couched in ' hard words ', was not calculated to promote peace; and when at last the Amir replied, he offered no apology, expressed no desire for improved relations. So deeply had the iron of distrust entered into him, that he believed these unfathomable British desired no friendship, would accept no apology. And Lord Lytton—receiving neither—promptly launched his ultimatum, allowing a further period of grace, at the insistence of Lord Salisbury. But Sher Ali remained silent and sullen in his threatened capital, heart-broken by the death of Abdulla Jān, and obliged, in consequence, to reinstate his true heir. Convinced that those aggressive English clearly meant to fight, he may have dreamed, Afghan-like, of luring them into his difficult country and overwhelming them, as before.

In any case, the 20th brought no reply: and on the 21st—after thirty-seven years of ' masterly inactivity '—a British army entered Afghanistan. On the 30th a letter dated 19th, vague and evasive in tone, reached the Khyber General—ten

days too late. The march of events had foreclosed on the hapless Amir.

Lord Lytton, from his own standpoint, had played his cards well. Most Englishmen, at home and in India, honestly believed Sher Ali to be faithless and foresworn, secretly in league with Russia. And as proof to that effect was not lacking, the few men who believed otherwise spoke to deaf ears. Undeniably the threat of Russia paramount at Kabul involved a very real menace to India; though both Lord Lytton and Cavagnari underrated the Afghan as a fighter, and the probable length of the war. This was their hour. The word had gone forth. Sir Donald Stewart's force was on its way to Kandahar. General Sir Sam Browne, V.C., had already captured Ali Musjid; and the Kuram Field Force was preparing to clear Afghan troops from the rugged range that closes Kuram Valley like a wall.

That stubborn task had been entrusted to a leader of proven courage and daring—Major Frederick Roberts, R.A., V.C., C.B.—destined to win new laurels in Afghanistan; to become, in later years, the universally beloved soldier, whom England and India delighted to honour.

A small, compact man, of untiring energy, with keen blue eyes and a resolute chin between his Balaclava whiskers; with a natural gift for initiative and swift decisions, an Irish readiness

to face risks, and to justify them by invincible courage in the hour of emergency: such was the 'Bobs' of Kipling's tribute—

> 'He has eyes all down his coat,
> And a bugle in his throat;
> And you will not play the goat—
> Under Bobs.'

A strict disciplinarian, he spared neither himself nor his men; and he could get the last ounce out of them by reason of his own example, his unfailing consideration for them, and that indefinable essence of leadership—personality. By a brave exploit in the Mutiny he had won the Victoria Cross; and on appointment to his first full command in the field, he was given the local rank of Major-General.

It was a moment of proud, if anxious responsibility, knowing—as he did—that his troops were too few, his transport woefully insufficient, even for those few. Easy enough for Lord Lytton, in Viceregal Lodge, to hug the fond belief that the mere threat of three approaching British Armies would suffice to overawe and subdue Sher Ali. It needed faith of quite another quality to face—ill-equipped yet undismayed—the rugged bulk of Peiwar Mountain, bristling with guns and regular Afghan troops, unlikely to be overawed by the threat of so small an invading force, however boldly led.

The Pass itself crossed a precipitous ridge two thousand feet above the valley: a position of such immense natural strength that, in the face of it, Roberts admitted—to himself alone—' a feeling akin to despair.' For none knew better than he that his numbers were ' terribly inadequate for the work to be done.' Yet done it must be.

In that resolute spirit he designed a plan for the only feasible form of attack—a turning movement, that would involve the capture of a lesser hill to the right of the Afghan position, coupled with a feint of attacking elsewhere. Not even his own troops—except commanding officers—must guess his true intent: everything hung on secrecy and surprise.

In the freezing dark of a December night his few picked regiments crept soundlessly out of camp, tents left standing, watch-fires burning: only five guns and a thousand men left for defence and the feint attack. If the small force—which he was using like a finely tempered sword —were broken against this rocky barrier, he had no other weapon for retrieving disaster. Whatever the odds, he must not fail.

Up and up they trailed, that thin line of troops and baggage animals, through a great ravine, narrowing to the rocky bed of a mountain stream. As the towering cliffs closed in on them, the bitter cold intensified and darkness deepened, till a waning moon looked over the edge, silvering one

cliff wall, but throwing into denser shadow the mere track they must follow: men and animals splashing through the stream, scrambling and stumbling over rocky boulders coated with ice; incessant halting to let the rear close up, though all hung on reaching the foot of the pass before dawn.

Roberts, anxious and impatient, rode forward to speed up the van, led by the 29th Punjab Infantry, a regiment of high repute; but the Pathan companies might possibly prove restive at the prospect of killing fellow-Moslems. He found them marching in very casual order; and even as he questioned the Colonel, two shots rang out. Colonel Gordon's Sikh orderly whispered, '*Hazúr,* there is treachery among the Pathans.'

It was a moment of acute anxiety. Those signal shots might wreck everything. Loth to discredit a fine regiment, or risk further delay to find out who had fired, Roberts could only change the order of the march and press on—hoping for the luck that seldom failed him at need.

As the east lightened, they reached the foot of the pass; and were greeted by a hail of bullets from above.

At a given order, the Gurkhas fixed bayonets and charged up the rocky slope, Highlanders and a Mountain Battery in support. Gallantly they rushed the first entrenchment; another and another: and Spin Gawai Kotal was won.

But ahead of them still loomed the stubborn bulk of the Peiwar. After their bitter night march, they must face a stiffer ascent through a dense pine forest—every rock or lurking shadow a possible enemy; over felled trees and masses of rock, now creeping, now climbing; urged on by the impatience of their General, he and his staff giving them a lead. In two hours they gained the summit—to be daunted by the discovery that no supposed ridge linked one kotal to the other. At their feet the ground fell away steeply. Across the chasm rose a densely wooded hill, alive with unseen Afghans: and the crackle of Enfield rifles laughed them to scorn. Worse: the vanguard, urged on by Roberts, had lost touch with the main body of troops. In the wood behind them, not a sign of Gurkhas, Highlanders or guns. Confused by the dense undergrowth they must have taken a wrong direction; and there, on jaded horses, sat Roberts and his staff, alone with the unreliable 29th Punjab Infantry, exposed to a galling fire from unknown enemy numbers, not a hundred and fifty yards off.

Danger so grave and immediate might well shake the stoutest nerve; but it was precisely such moments of crisis that revealed the full measure of Roberts as a soldier and a man. A forward move looked impossible; yet his indomitable spirit saved him from a fatal move backward that would have drawn the Afghans after him,

and sealed the fate of his small scattered force. If there had been some error in over-haste, it was finely atoned for now. One after another he sent his staff officers to seek the missing troops, hoping that the sound of firing might guide them aright. None returned; and none were now left but the Reverend J. Adams, a soldierly parson, who had begged to go with him as A.D.C. Adams, too, was sent off on the fruitless quest; while Roberts, with imperturbable *sang-froid*, showed as bold a front to the bewildered enemy as though he had an army corps behind him instead of one infantry regiment, half of it possibly ripe for mutiny. Unexpected inaction encouraged the Afghans. Every moment their firing increased. Even a vain forward move were better than none—could the unreliable 29th be urged by a personal appeal to wipe out the slur cast on their loyalty.

A vain hope. Response came only from the Sikhs; and their Captain told Roberts privately that the Moslems would not fight.

Even that ill news failed to shake his nerve. With such men as he could trust, the forward move must at least be attempted. It was a gallant venture against impossible odds; for his men were too few, the Afghans too strong in numbers and position. Back they must clamber to their exposed hill-top, harassed by a jubilant enemy; the General's devoted orderlies—two Sikhs, two Pathans, two Gurkhas—valiantly protecting him

throughout, resolved that no bullet should touch him if one of them could intervene. Baulked, but not cast down, they returned to find their missing comrades pouring out of the wood—Gurkhas, Highlanders and guns.

But numbers alone could not solve the main problem. Its solution arrived opportunely in the person of an officer from General Palmer's co-operating force. From him Roberts learnt how that smaller force had worked round the far side of Peiwar Kotal and up through a narrow defile; how one of their officers had caught a distant glimpse of the whole Afghan camp; soldiers, followers and animals asleep in fancied security; had seen a hill-top, whence a few shells might be dropped among them with telling effect.

Decisive action at last. In no time two mountain guns were dropping shell after shell into that crowded mass of men and animals, spreading confusion and dismay. Tents caught fire. Terrified mules, camels and drivers bolted helter-skelter, causing a scare that soon infected all ranks. Gunfire slackened; the infantry broke and fled. Roberts, through his telescope, watched them scurrying away down the road to Ali Khel—and knew he had achieved his end.

His own troops held the Spin Gawai Kotal; Palmer's troops held the Peiwar. That satisfying certainty must suffice till next morning: since he could neither cut off the Afghan retreat, nor

force on his willing men till they had been refreshed by food and sleep. As it was—for precaution's sake—they must drop into a deep *nullah*, cross a frozen stream and push up on to higher ground. There, on the bitter hillside, nine thousand feet above the sea, they slept under the stars, without even coats to cover them; impervious, through utter weariness, to hunger, hard lying and twenty degrees of frost.

Roberts himself slept as soundly as on a feather bed. His hazardous action had been crowned with victory. A position deemed impregnable had been gained; several regiments of the Afghan army routed, and eighteen guns with large stores of amunition captured: an achievement for which he gave full credit to his troops, while they in turn gave honour where it was due. One who fought his first battle that day, wrote afterwards: 'From the start, General Roberts inspired all under his command with supreme confidence in his judgment as a General, in his boldness as an intrepid leader.'[1] And to a leader who has won the full confidence of his troops all things are possible.

He had dispersed—as bidden—all Afghan garrisons south of the Shutar Gurdan Pass; and their achievement chimed in with successes elsewhere. Sir Sam Browne had pushed on to Jalálabad. Sir Donald Stewart, early in January,

[1] C. G. Robertson.

occupied Kandahar. By then the last of the Russians had long since vanished from Kabul. Sher Ali—deserted by one Great Power, threatened by another—had released his true heir and decided on flight from three victorious British columns preparing to sweep the country almost unopposed.

To Sir Sam Browne he had sent word that he was leaving Kabul for St Petersburg to lay his case before the Czar. But at the outsetting of that vast journey he was ignominiously checked by the Governor of Tashkent, who turned him back from the Russian frontier. Ill and broken-hearted, he remained in Afghan-Turkistan, whence he wrote to his former friends: 'If any harm shall now befall Afghanistan, the dust of the blame will settle on his Imperial Majesty's Government.' But Imperial officials—thick coated already with 'dust of blame'—were troubled not at all by the curse of a dying Amir.

For the end was at hand. Sher Ali, self-dethroned, made no effort to recover his shattered health. He refused food and medicine, refused to let doctors remove his mortified leg. What mattered a diseased limb, compared with news from Kabul that the British armies had been everywhere held up by natural difficulties. A part of Stewart's force, aiming at Herāt, had been checked on the Helmund river. Browne, for lack of carriage, never left Jalālabad.

Roberts' troops—after the dashing Peiwar victory—remained encamped in the Kuram, their numbers daily thinned by disease. No sign anywhere of that swift advance on Kabul. And for Sher Ali—ill-happed by fate and his own failings—there remained only death.

In February, 1879, the son who had no cause to mourn him, informed Lord Lytton that his honoured father had 'cast off the dress of existence, obeyed the voice of the Summoner, and hastened to the region of Divine Mercy.'

His death and the accession of Yakub Khan—who had no quarrel with England—brought the brief first phase of the Afghan War to a victorious end. Remained for Lord Lytton to gather the fruits of victory, which do not always tally with the aims of battle.

2

THE swift—if partial—success of that three-fold advance changed the whole political aspect of India and Central Asia. It discomfited Russia. It justified Lord Lytton; and brought the 'buffer state' within the orbit of the new Indian Empire. General Roberts was awarded a K.C.B.; and the Kuram Valley Field Force remained more or less in being, either to create a new 'forward' cantonment, or to advance in fighting order, if need arose. And there were many who believed it would arise. Though British arms had triumphed, no great battle had been fought, no loss inflicted severe enough to shake the Afghans' arrogant conceit of themselves. And it still remained for Simla to achieve a fair treaty with the new Amir.

To him Lord Lytton offered much the same terms as to his father, and they met—as he might have foreseen—with much the same reception. Yakub Khan would cede no territory; would admit no resident British officer, except at Kabul,

justly arguing that he could not guarantee their safety in a land of fanatical Moslems. These flat refusals—dismaying to an optimistic Viceroy—convinced all experienced officers that only by a march on Kabul, and peace terms there dictated, could British supremacy be lastingly affirmed. But a strong anti-war feeling in England evoked the decree that, unless Yakub Khan proved actively hostile, a fair treaty must be drawn up, laying stress on an advanced frontier line and British influence paramount at Kabul.

To that end Viceroy and Amir exchanged reams of polite correspondence, resulting in partial acceptance of the terms proposed by Major Cavagnari, who would proceed forthwith to Kabul. On March the 29th he received a letter endorsing the Amir's promise to conform, in all matters of conduct, with his sincere professions of loyalty to the British Government. On April the 4th there fell into his hands an intercepted proclamation to certain Border tribes, who had given serious trouble, bidding them have no fear of the infidels, against whom he would shortly launch an irresistible army.

'And, by God's favour,' was his pious conclusion, 'the whole of them will go to the fire of hell for evermore. Therefore . . . kill them to the best of your ability.'

Here, it seemed, was providential proof that

any peace-treaty made with Yakub would prove a house founded on sand. But a man wedded to a policy contracts unconsciously a fatal will-to-blindness. Not even clearest evidence that the Amir spoke with two voices could divert Cavagnari from his fixed purpose: a British Embassy at Kabul. But that was to be—not yet. The Amir, still half-afraid of Russia, deferred the British visitation by proposing to come down and discuss his treaty in Sir Sam Browne's camp at Gandamak—scene of the last stand made by a broken British regiment in the awful winter of 1841. So it came to pass that on the 8th of May, 1879, the new Amir rode into the British camp with his friend, Cavagnari, and an imposing escort; troops lining the road for three miles, presenting arms as he passed; the hills echoing to a royal salute.

Such was the brilliant first act of a drama that was to prove sufficiently tragic, in the issue, for all concerned.

From two weeks of incessant talking, there emerged a treaty more or less on the lines laid down: an increased yearly subsidy and a permanent British Envoy at Kabul; the Amir to guarantee his safety and honourable treatment, and to keep, if he so desired, an Afghan Envoy at Simla. As treaties go, it was fair enough. Yet there were many who doubted the wisdom of once more pressing an undesired ambassador

upon a stiff-necked people, with so black a record of treachery, cruelty and evil-doing.

To the cautious few who spoke their minds, Cavagnari's answer was conclusive: 'If my death sets the red line on the Hindu Khush, I don't care——' To all forebodings and demurs he opposed his assured conviction, his notable personality and prevailing will. More: he begged leave of the Viceroy to prove in his own person the soundness of the policy that both men had at heart. And to Lytton it seemed no better choice could be made for so high and difficult an office than the remarkable man, whose tact and skill had engineered the treaty. So straightway he was appointed Envoy and Plenipotentiary, with a K.C.B. to enhance his prestige at the court of Kabul. And on a sultry May morning young Jenkyns—his Political Assistant—galloped away from tragic Gandamak 'with a particular-looking tin case strapped to his shoulders'; all unaware that it contained the death warrant of himself and his distinguished chief.

Even at that early date Yakub Khan revealed, by certain minor decisions, how little he could trust either his own power or his own people. Why else must he ask for the Mission to travel by the Kuram route, instead of direct from

Gandamak? Clearly the excitable, independent Khyberri tribes were masters of the situation. And a further request for six weeks in which to make arrangements, implied probable opposition from his more powerful chiefs.

Both requests were granted. Cavagnari left Simla for the Kuram Valley on July the 6th with Jenkyns, Dr. Kelly, a medical officer, and his mixed escort of Guides, commanded by Walter Pollock Hamilton, V.C., a cavalry subaltern, of whom great things were expected by all who knew him. Fair-haired and tall—over six feet—his fine physique and appearance were allied to soldierly qualities of mind and character that won all hearts, and had already won him the Queen's Cross, in a gallant fight with Sir Sam Browne's column; a fight worth briefly recording.

It happened that a battery of Artillery and a squadron of Guides Cavalry had been told off to disperse a horde of *ghazis*; and in the first charge, Major Wigram Battye had been mortally wounded. But the squadron, led by young Hamilton, swept on with the wild battle yell of the Guides, over broken country gashed with deep *nullahs*, eager to avenge the death of their beloved leader.

A sudden cry from the ground scouts gave warning of a cleft impassable for cavalry: a nine-foot drop into a narrow, stony river-bed, a sheer

ascent opposite crowned with yelling, firing *ghazis*. But the guns were hard pressed; not a sign yet of infantry in support. So on went Walter Hamilton, scouts or no.

Urging on his charger, he sprang into the narrow gulf. 'And after him, scrambling, jumping anyhow, nohow, like a pack of hounds, streamed his fierce following. Scattering up and down the *nullah* in clumps of twos and threes, they found egress somehow. Then came death and the Prophet's Paradise to many a brave soul. From here and there, from front and right and left, charged home those gallant horsemen; and at their head, alone with his trumpeter, rode Hamilton.

'An onslaught so fierce and resolute—fit to shake the nerve of disciplined troops—very soon broke those brave, undisciplined levies into a tumbled, flying crowd, pursued by the exultant squadron till men and horses could no more.' [1]

To six of the troopers that charge brought the coveted Order of Merit; to Walter Hamilton a brilliantly earned Victoria Cross, for gallant leadership and for saving the life of a sowar, in mortal danger, set upon by three Pathans. To him, now, fell also the honour of commanding Sir Louis Cavagnari's escort of Guides—twenty-five cavalry and fifty infantry. And no

[1] Colonel George Younghusband's *Story of the Guides*.

doubt there were many brother officers who envied him—at the time.

It was not till the 17th of July that Cavagnari and his party reached Sir Frederick Roberts' camp beyond the Peiwar Kotal on his way to the new frontier line at Karatega, where he would be met by an Afghan Sirdar and General. That night he gave a farewell dinner party to disappointed officers baulked of the Kabul adventure. Cheerful and assured, alive to risks, yet confident of the outcome, he consoled them with the prospect of safe travel in Afghanistan next year. There were those who believed; but there were many who doubted. And among the last was none more troubled at heart than the little General, who knew too well the dangers of a premature peace treaty with a fierce and untrustworthy people; knew that those four fine men would probably never see India again. Called on to propose their health, he could achieve no more than the bare formalities, nor could he shake off the oppression of gloomy foreboding; while Cavagnari was full of plans for a cold weather tour along the Western Afghan frontier and arangements for his wife to join him in the spring. Yet there were those in Simla who had heard him say that the chances were four to one against a safe return: a view confirmed weeks later by wise old John Lawrence, when the news of Lytton's forward move reached England. 'They

will all be murdered,' he said—'every single one of them.' Possibly Roberts thought the same.

Next morning came the Afghan Sirdar with his Cavalry General, and the whole party rode off between lines of troops to the *boom-boom* of fifteen guns. At the boundary rock, they were greeted by the Amir's 9th Cavalry—diabolical-looking scoundrels, in slovenly scarlet tunics, shabby helmets half over their eyes and chin-straps dangling on their chests. Hampered by that fantastic escort they rode on, Roberts with Cavagnari in the van: and while they talked, a solitary magpie flew past, unheeded by the General.

Cavagnari turned and said quickly: 'Don't tell my wife we saw a magpie: she would take it for a bad omen.' And again a shadow of foreboding passed across the older man's mind.

It was deepened that same evening by one of those curious chances, which men look back upon —and wonder . . .?

After a sumptuous Eastern dinner in the Afghan camp, and a cheerful 'God-speed' to the chosen four, Cavagnari rode half way back with the General. On the Red Kotal they parted cheerfully and rode off on their different ways.

It was then that Roberts—moved by some indefinable impulse—turned in his saddle for a last

look at Cavagnari. To his surprise, the Envoy turned also at the same moment.

Without a word they both rode back, shook hands a second time, and parted—not to meet again.

3

There is a legend among Afghans—which speaks for itself—that when Satan, disgraced and defeated, 'fell like lightning from heaven', he fell on to Kabul City. Hence its black record of faithlessness and crime: a record that can show no darker page than the brief and tragic tale of Sir Louis Cavagnari's Mission to the Court of England's professed ally, Amir Mahomed Yakub Khan.

By the end of July 1879, he had made all arrangements for a political invasion secretly undesired; had prepared a Residency for Envoy, staff and escort within the precincts of his citadel, the Bāla Hissar.[1] Built up the slope of a stony ridge, its embattled towers dominated the city—a rough triangle of flat-roofed houses wedged between outlying spurs of the Hindu Khush. Through the city flowed Kabul river. Beyond it lay ripening cornfields and vineyards and crumpled foot-hills that climbed to the snow

[1] Fort.

line of the great main ranges. The lower Hissar was in itself a lesser town, with its own shops and houses and its beautiful Shah Bagh [1] below the Palace. The upper Hissar—a citadel within a citadel—commanded the whole of Kabul and her suburbs: the one point of strength in a singularly defenceless town.

For thirty-seven years no infidel Englishmen had entered Kabul, except as stray travellers. Now there came this bearded British Envoy with three other white men, all riding in gilded howdahs on state elephants, followed by their own Indian troops; Afghan regiments lining the streets to do them honour, by order of the new Amir, whose word was by no means law to his lawless people. But he had promised them that, when the Feringhis came, he would lighten all taxes and hearten his hungry soldiers with arrears of pay, long overdue. For if the Feringhi had few merits, he had usually many rupees.

Meanwhile, here was a fine *tamāsha*—infidels or no.

As the Embassy entered the Citadel through the Peshawar Gate, troops saluted, bands played 'The Queen', a battery of eighteen-pounders thundered a royal welcome. For Cavagnari, the arrival in state was the crowning triumph of his policy and personal ambition. He had faced all

[1] King's Garden.

risks—not for himself alone: and here was his reward.

No shadow of coming events clouded their first week of a new life, new interests and duties. There were informal talks with a friendly, if unreliable, Amir. There were constant visits of ceremony from his chief Sirdars. Kelly was planning to start a dispensary. Walter Hamilton, hoping to promote friendly intercourse, encouraged the practice of sports—tent-pegging, lemon-cutting, and feats of horsemanship—in which Afghans were invited to join. Many accepted in a jovial spirit of emulation: but many more looked askance at displays of infidel prowess which seemed to say, 'Thus will we split and slice all Afghans who resist the British Ráj.' And there were none to warn Hamilton of the false colour put upon his soldierly bid for friendship.

So, for all four Englishmen, the days passed pleasantly enough in their spacious quarters, near the palace: two flat-roofed houses of lath and plaster, built out from the wall of the citadel, round a vast courtyard. Above them, on the west, rose the battlemented tower of the Amir's arsenal; but their south rooms looked out across the moat to open country and the far hills of Tazín. If there was only rough comfort, as Englishmen understood the word, there was decency and cleanliness, at least within their own

precincts; a pleasant contrast to the chronic state of dirt and dilapidation that prevailed elsewhere. No wonder Cavagnari—riding daily through narrow lanes choked with filth and all abominations—dreamed of building a fine Residency outside the city, where he might welcome his wife in the spring.

It was near the middle of August that Kelly wrote to his father: 'We are treated with every consideration by the Amir, who insists on our being his guests. We and our servants, horses and troops, are all fed at his expense. But the people are fanatical: not yet used to our presence. So we always ride about with a troop of cavalry . . . This is the time of the chief Moslem fast of the year. Between sunrise and sunset they may neither eat nor drink. But old Yakub gave us tea this morning after our ride.'

Thus Kelly, untroubled by dark hints that were already reaching the Envoy's ears. Before July was out, he knew of the Amir's promises to lighten taxes and pay his half-mutinous army, when the British came to Kabul: and on August the 6th he had clear warning of mischief on foot among certain regiments lately arrived from Herāt. It was brought by no scaremonger, but by a pensioned Native officer of Indian cavalry, Ressaldar-Major Nakshband Khan.

He told how these regiments had marched through the city led by their officers, bands play-

ing, swords unsheathed, abusing the Amir and the Envoy by name. These doings, he felt, should be known of and checked. But Cavagnari dismissed, with an aphorism, his well-founded concern.

'Never fear,' said he, 'Dogs that bark don't bite.'

'Sahib, these dogs *do* bite,' the Ressaldar insisted, knowing his people. 'There is real danger.'

And Cavagnari answered coolly, 'Well, they can but kill the few of us here; and our deaths would be avenged.' A brave answer; though it ignored the cost, in money and good men's lives, of wreaking vengeance on the capital of a distant and difficult country.

The good Ressaldar, pained and puzzled, tried once again—through a Hindu of high standing—to enlighten a Sahib as blind as he was courageous. This time his obstacle was the sentry. Placed on guard by the Amir's orders, he refused to let the Hindu pass: stoned and abused him for persisting in the attempt.

It was an insult that could not be ignored; and the Ressaldar, reporting it in person, ventured an outspoken comment: 'What use, Sahib, in being here, if you are treated like a prisoner, not permitted to see men who only desire to tell you the truth?'

That pointed thrust took effect on a man proud

to the verge of arrogance. He gave orders that the sentry be removed: and the Amir, when he heard of it, was exceedingly angry—not with the sentry for acting on instructions, but with his friend, the British Envoy.

An incident so equivocal must have disturbed any man whose eyes were not holden. In spite of it, Cavagnari failed even to utilise Lord Lytton's offer of an advance on the Amir's subsidy that would enable him to pay up his troops. He merely reported alarming news of rebellion and desertions all over the country and the mutinous behaviour of those Herāti regiments; adding, "I have been strongly advised not to go out, for a day or two.'

Those words of grave import appear to have troubled the Viceroy as little as they troubled Cavagnari. Heedless of warning, he went out as usual. Heedless of hints—and more than hints—that Yakub Khan was playing him false, he clung to his blind belief in the Amir's good faith and acted accordingly. He withdrew his guard from the Residency gate. He rode out daily with a troop of Afghan cavalry and a few of his own escort. In talk with the Amir, or his Ministers, he resolutely spoke his mind as among friends. A keen sportsman, he gave more time to partridge shooting and to planning his grand tour with the Amir than to keeping a watchful eye on the trend of events in Kabul or elsewhere.

From the people he held proudly aloof, even from the Persian Kuzzilbashes, who alone were friendly to the English. He actually refused the offer of a house in their quarter, where he and his party would have been comparatively safe. He saw no reason, it seems, to consider the question of safety. Yet his own escort knew—if he did not—that no Sikh or Hindu among them dared enter the city; that even Moslems went armed; and all were treated to scowling looks or taunting words that they would think shame of repeating to their Sahibs. But among themselves they spoke freely of Afghan enmity, and prophesied their own coming doom.

It is a British instinct to challenge danger; and a man of Cavagnari's natural courage may well have thought that the Mission's best chance lay in maintaining a bold front, in tacitly assuming the Amir's will and power to keep his given word.

If his companions were less blind or more sceptical, the Amir himself was receiving daily proof that—whatever his will—his power to enforce it was a negligible quantity. Sher Ali's embittered hatred of the British—sown broadcast—was bearing fruit now to the discomfiture of his ill-used son. All over his kingdom Mullahs were preaching a *jehād*[1] against the English; and unless he could win them over, he might be deserted wholesale. His fierce, wild people, his

[1] Holy war.

powerful Sirdars, had no tradition of loyalty even to an Amir. They could only be controlled by force of arms. He suspected that his brother, Ayub Khan—Governor of Herāt—had designs on Kandahar. He knew that his cousin, Abdur Rahmān—a man of resolute character—hovered inTurkestan, biding his time.

If these factors were not fully known to Cavagnari, he must have gleaned much disturbing information during his visits to the palace. Yet on August 30th he wrote privately to Lord Lytton: 'I have nothing whatever to complain of as regards the Amir and his Ministers. His authority is weak throughout Afghanistan; but, notwithstanding all that people say against him, *I* personally believe he will prove a very good ally, and that we shall be able to keep him to his agreements.'

Thus, by his over-sanguine conviction, he succeeded in deceiving himself and others—to his own undoing.

On September the 2nd, he wired to Simla, 'All well with the Kabul Embassy.' And next day, before sunset, Embassy and escort were all dead men.

That morning, the Residency party rode out as usual. That morning, also, the Herātis, in Sherpur Cantonments, were ordered up to the Bāla Hissar to receive full arrears of pay. There

they paraded, unarmed, at eight o'clock, in the pay garden, not a hundred yards from the Residency: and there they were told that the Amir could give them no more than one month's pay —a miserable pittance for hungry men.

Baulked and angry, they demanded full payment from Generals who were powerless to go beyond their orders. One of them, it is said, shouted angrily, ' If you want more pay, go to Cavagnari Sahib. Plenty of money there.'

The incitement—deliberate or no—sent them to Cavagnari: a rush of maddened, hungry soldiers, genuinely hoping for redress——

And while mutual altercation swelled louder, four unsuspecting Englishmen, within the Residency, were taking up the day's routine after their early ride: Hamilton and Kelly at stables; Cavagnari waiting for his bath; the Guides—not yet in uniform—taking their ease; the cavalry in an outer enclosure, tending their picketed horses. The angry interview in the King's Garden concerned them not at all. Afghans were excitable people, given to much clamour.

And suddenly, to their startled ears, came the rising roar of an angry crowd; three regiments of defrauded soldiers yelling for Cavagnari, demanding money with curses and threats. Before the full danger was realised by officers or men, the Herātis had rushed the walled enclosure. Hustling and stoning the sowars, they untied their

horses, plundered swords and saddlery; shouting 'If we can't get money, we'll take all we can.'

Stones hurtled at the Residency windows. The gates were closed against them; and Cavagnari —appearing on the lower roof-top—called out to them that they had better go elsewhere, as the matter of pay was not in his hands.

They showed no inclination to go elsewhere: and suddenly, above the uproar, a shot rang out —another—and another——

Who fired them, none ever knew. But the sound of a musket changed the temper of the crowd. Instantly they rushed off to fetch arms and ammunition from Sherpur, two miles away.

And when they were gone, there fell a pause. . . .

That brief respite from the sudden and startling onslaught, awoke full realisation of the impending danger in the Residency—and in the palace over the way. It was the Amir's one chance, that day, to prove his active goodwill toward those whose personal safety he had guaranteed. For the Herātis had two miles to run each way; and there were troops of his own at hand: a regiment guarding the treasury, an arsenal full of ammunition, and some two thousand armed followers around his palace. Had he sent even a guard of these across to the Residency, the final tragedy might have been averted. Yet nothing was done.

While his *mullahs* and *syeds* urged him, in the name of hospitality, to save his guests, he merely stood outside the palace weeping and tearing his hair; high officials gravely looking on; three batteries of artillery standing to their guns.

In vain the head *mullah* protested, 'Why are you crying here? Your guests will be murdered!'

'My *kismet* is bad,' he wailed. 'What can I do?'

'You can order your guns to fire when the regiments return.'

'What use? The city *badmashes* will come and eat us all up.'

'*Bismillah!* At least you can die, rather than disgrace Islam.'

But Mahomed Yakub Khan preferred to disgrace Islam.

He sent no guard over the way, he retreated into his palace, still weeping and tearing his clothes. And when an urgent call came from Cavagnari—claiming royal protection—he sent the temporising answer of his kind: 'As God wills, I am making preparation.'

For all that, his troops never once fired on the Herātis, the Bāla Hissar gates were never closed against the scum of the city, who soon came hurtling through them, armed with swords and knives, shouting, 'Kill the Infidels! Kill—Kill!'

He deliberately left his Ambassador and staff —with their escort, servants and followers—to

put up a hopeless, heroic fight against hundreds that soon swelled to thousands.

That they were doomed men they must all have known within the first half hour. The Residency itself was 'a regular rat-trap'; both flat roofs—their only vantage grounds—overlooked by many other roofs, and almost within pistol shot of the arsenal bastion, that towered sixty feet above them. On three sides they were surrounded by houses and narrow lanes; the fourth formed part of the outer wall.

While young Hamilton collected his men and made impromptu dispositions, Sir Louis Cavagnari awaited the Amir's futile answer in no enviable frame of mind: his faith in Yakub Khan rudely shaken, his eyes rudely opened to the fallacy of his own vain dream and the Viceroy's insistence on an Embassy at Kabul before the hour was ripe. Looking out, for the last time, on the far gleam of snow-peaks in the early light, he must have felt a pang of conscience at thought of his doomed companions.

Doomed or no, they would all die fighting; their desperate resistance heartened by a hope that the longer they held out, the better chance for the Amir to pacify his mutinous troops.

Too soon unmistakable signs heralded the return of those three regiments fully armed; their numbers swelled by other troops and by all the scum of Kabul city. Out of every unclean

street and by-way they swarmed through the unclosed gates, with the awful composite roar of men who have fallen lower than the beasts that perish—men craving slaughter for slaughter's sake.

And above the din of voices, the rush of trampling feet, rose the fierce '*Yar-charya!*' war-cry of the Sunni sect of Moslems, their blood-lust intensified by the prayer and fasting of Ramzān, by the certainty that not a man among those trapped infidels could escape the fires of hell.

With the return of the troops there began a systematic and determined attack on both Residency buildings, ably assisted by an armed mob. From the arsenal, bullets began dropping on to the Residency roof held by Hamilton and his men. For them, no shred of cover, no chance of target practice against assailants crouched behind parapets, dealing death without risk to life or limb. Not so Cavagnari. Lying flat on the exposed roof of his own quarters, he was coolly picking off enemy leaders with swift precision. Four of them he had killed, when a splintered bullet struck his forehead and put him out of action.

From that time forward, the whole burden of defence was laid on young Hamilton, with Jenkyns to share his desperate task, while Kelly devoted himself to the wounded: more and more

of them, as firing increased from the house-tops, from lanes and walls, whence the mob so fiercely pursued their harassing tactics that Hamilton ordered a charge in the hope of driving them off. Inevitably they would return; but there was virtue in every ounce of respite from the tireless assault. In that first charge the wounded Envoy himself took part; and the astonished Afghans, boldly attacked, turned and ran—in the words of an eye-witness—' like sheep before a wolf '. They were destined to be increasingly astonished before the day's ending.

Though the Guides killed many, they were slowly beaten back: and after the first charge, Cavagnari was no more seen. Only a hurrying sepoy caught sight of him, laid upon a bed, his feet drawn up, hands clutching his head, Dr Kelly bending over him, doing what he could.

So died Cavagnari—a very brave man, whose courage covered many imperfections of character and judgment. Fortunate he, to be spared the terrible hours of strain and torment long drawn out.

For now they were beset by peril more immediate. The rebel troops had bored rough loopholes in the walls. Rifle muzzles spat and crackled at close quarters—a murderous fire. The very rooms became untenable. Now the Afghans brought ladders and ran up them like monkeys. On to the roof they swarmed, yelling and

brandishing blood-stained knives, forcing the few Guides, who manned the parapet, down the steps into the house, rushing boldly after them—to their undoing. For the Guides had drawn them down only to turn on them in the narrow space, and kill and kill, driving out the discomfited invaders.

Once again a letter had been smuggled to the Amir, with no more result than the first. That it reached him is known; for the messenger lived to tell how, on arrival, he was bidden to wait for orders—that were never received; how, in the palace, all was terror and indecision. The Amir — guilty or negligent — was now thoroughly alarmed; fearful lest the city *badmashes*, in their fury, should turn on him also for his friendship with infidels.

Because of that fear, he refused to fire on the crowd. Instead—shamed by reproachful *mullahs*—he vainly sent out his eight-year-old son, with a few Sirdars and the boy's tutor, holding aloft the Koran, urging an infuriated mob, in the name of God, to cease their bloody work.

Instantly the book was snatched from him, flung down and trampled on; pleas and protests drowned in yells of rage, rattle of musketry, crash of tumbling walls. And the terrified ambassadors beat a hurried retreat, thankful to escape with their lives. General Daoud Shah, riding out with a few troopers, was unhorsed and

stoned; and the *mullahs*—having done what they could—retired to pray.

No leisure for prayer on the far side of that surging multitude; no terror and confusion, no indecision; though for five hours the fight had raged with unceasing fury; though half the garrison had been killed and wounded, and Kelly's hands were over full.

On Hamilton fell the three-fold strain of cool planning, desperate resisting, and keeping up the hearts of his men. For the Moslems among them were assailed at intervals by shouts from Afghan officers: 'Give up your Sahibs, and you shall go free. We have no quarrel with you. Be not fools, to fight with accursed Feringhis against the Faithful.'

And the Guides gave them, for answer, a stinging shower of bullets from the rifles of the White Queen.

By now they were hemmed in—above, below, on every hand; adjoining houses and roofs alive with dark faces and scurrying forms; their own roof untenable; their number reduced to thirty men under one stout-hearted Jemadar; rooms and courtyard choked with dead and dying, oppressive with smoke of powder and shot.

Suddenly, through that familiar nightmare, came drifting wraiths of smoke other than powder; and the fatal smell of burning wood told them the basement was on fire. Afghans over-

head, devouring flames below: between hell and its devils, they were trapped indeed. Yet none spoke or thought of surrender. Only, for the third and last time that day, Jenkyns made a foredoomed attempt to remind the Amir of his duty as host and ally.

His messenger—an Afghan Prince serving as cavalry trooper—sprang fully armed, straight from the low roof's edge, into the jaws of a hundred baying wolves, many of whom unwillingly broke the shock of his fall. Before they could seize him, he was pushing his way through the crowd, flinging up his arms and crying, 'Peace! Don't shoot. I am one of you. I bear a message for the Amir.'

In speaking, he recognised a friend—and so won through to the royal apartment, where the ruler of Afghanistan cowered lamenting, among his women. Useless, he said, to come asking for help. Man could do no more. They were all in the hands of God. But the trooper, like his fellow, was kept in the palace. He could send no word to the Residency: worse still—no help.

And now, from that direction came the fatal thunder of big guns, that told him the end was near. Against guns, even the bravest, in that battered, burning house, could scarce hold out for an hour. So he believed, though for years he had known the Guides and the officers who led them.

He was mistaken. They continued to hold out —in the teeth of all that devil or man could do against them—with a stubborn courage that has seldom, even in British annals, been surpassed. Loud and exultant shouts announced that two guns had been trained on to the main gateway: and the Guides—half stifled with smoke, driven by fire and shot from room to room—responded as one man when the boy Hamilton commanded a desperate attempt to capture or silence those fatal guns.

They were but twelve against thousands; and in ordinary warfare the command must have sounded like madness. But this was no ordinary warfare; these were no ordinary men; lifted as they were above human stature by the terrible exigencies of the hour.

As the door was flung open, they charged straight at that howling mob, led by Walter Hamilton, a splendid figure of young manhood, lithe and strong and of good courage.

Unscathed they crossed the deadly bullet-swept courtyard, and fell with fury on to the amazed gunners and the crowd behind the wall. Shooting, thrusting, slashing, they killed or routed every man round the guns; seized them, swung them round and even dragged them a few yards, heedless of bullets that rained from all sides. But men were falling fast; and the overwhelming return of dispersed Afghans drove

them at last back to the open door with the loss of half their numbers. In that sortie the end came for Kelly, who had left his wounded to join in the soldierly attempt, and died a soldier's death.

But no pause was permitted them to grieve for the loss of a comrade and six good men.

Almost at once a second salvo shook the building: and Hamilton, in the same breath, ordered yet another charge. Hopeless or no, something must be attempted, if they were not to die like rats in a hole. Again they flung open the door; again rushed out, as though they were half an army, instead of half a dozen Guides and two Sahibs, who knew not the meaning of defeat.

There Jenkyns fell, wielding a sword he had never learnt to use; but on went Hamilton, untouched by bullet or bayonet, as though he bore a charmed life. He and that handful of resolute men once more drove off Afghan soldiers and seized the guns. For a few yards they dragged them, exhausted though they were with the heart-straining struggle of a task beyond human power. Engulfed by the returning tidal wave, fighting foot by foot, they were forced back into the burning house, where devouring flames curled upward, charred woodwork crumbled, roofs fell in with a dull crash, burying dead and wounded in one awful grave.

No refuge, now, for the few survivors, but an

underground bath-place of solid brick. There they could breathe and take a few moments' respite, after seven hours of Homeric struggle: but there, very soon, they would be found and cruelly killed by one of the cruellest races on earth. Better to die fighting, no matter how forlorn the hope. So the dauntless Hamilton laid his plans for yet another sortie: to capture even one gun would delay the end, give the Amir a further chance of subduing his people—if he could or would.

Three of the Guides were to fire through a rift on the assailants; the remaining three to charge out with him.

'I, alone,' he said with superb assurance, 'will face the enemy. You others pay no heed to the firing. Harness yourselves to the gun and bring it in. Then we will charge out again and capture the other.'

A noble order; nobly obeyed.

Out again they dashed—three men and one tall officer with an *élan* that must fairly have staggered those rejoicing Afghans. A third time they captured the gun, while Hamilton alone confronted the enemy. Sword in his right hand, pistol in his left, he towered conspicuous, facing certain death with the same high courage that he would have faced life, had he lived.

Bullets rained. Endless Afghans surged forward, waving naked blades. Fierce dark faces,

closed in on him, as he stood there slashing and firing, right and left, guarding his men and the captured gun. Singly, he was a match for the most stalwart: cool, swift, alert, as if he wore bullet-proof armour.

Parrying a thrust at his throat, a slashing stroke at his head, he had sabred three Afghans and shot three others before they made a concerted rush to overwhelm him. Cuts and thrusts, too swift for mortal man to parry, sent him staggering to the ground—undefeated in spirit to the end——

And over his dead body they swarmed; recaptured the gun, and swept back into the house those few remaining Guides—hungry, exhausted, leaderless—who would surely now surrender at discretion.

So they supposed, in their ignorance of the spirit that pervades all ranks of a disciplined army. Men, who had seen their dauntless leader cut down, were in no mood to make terms with his murderers.

In vain the Afghans shouted, 'Why fight any longer? Your Sahibs are killed. Surrender—and we will give you quarter.'

'We surrender no Government property,' the stout-hearted Jemadar Jewand Singh flung them his answer. 'We obey our Sahibs' orders, alive or dead. We are fighting for the fame of the Guides.'

So they marched out, the six of them—resolute to kill and kill, while breath remained in their bodies.

The tale was told by a soldier-prisoner—himself imprisoned—who looked out from a window on those final sorties—and bore witness to the valour of Jewand Singh, who out-lasted all his comrades, and accounted for eight Afghans before the inevitable end.

By sunset, on that 3rd of September, there were neither Guides nor Englishmen in Kabul any more. But around them lay some four hundred Afghans, dead or dying, witnesses to a defeat that might rank as victory.

And from afar off the old *Mullah*, who had urged Yakub Khan to action, saw that which had been the Residency shrouded in dust and smoke and leaping tongues of flame; saw the mob flocking back to the city, shouting the good news that all the Kafirs were dead.

'Then I knew,' he said, long after, 'that the English would come to Kabul.'

PHASE II

I

In Simla an unusually brilliant season was nearing its end. Few among the crowd of busy idlers gave more than a passing thought to the successfully-accomplished Kabul Embassy. If the Viceroy had any private qualms, he never spoke of them; nor did General Roberts, who had spent the summer in Simla at work on an Army Commission, and had laid his plans for long leave at Home.

On September the 4th he fell asleep, untroubled by thoughts of Kabul; and in the small hours he was awakened by his wife.

A man with a telegram—she told him—was wandering round the house, vainly calling and calling. At once he sprang up and hurried downstairs; he opened the flimsy envelope, and read—with a shock of horror—a message from the Political Officer at Ali Khel. A Ghilzai from Kabul had brought news of the sudden attack and the brave defence. He had left before the end came; but too well Roberts knew what the

end must be. Early as it was, he dressed and hurried off to Viceregal Lodge; found Lord Lytton in council, stunned by the very worst that could have befallen him, anxious to suppress the news till all was known.

Within twenty-four hours the shock fell on Simla, shrouding the last of that brilliant season in gloom. It fell on the Guides—in their regimental home at Hōti Mardān. It startled and horrified incredulous men and women all over India. It smote Lord Lytton, as man and Viceroy, through the loss of his friend, Cavagnari, and the collapse of his untimely Kabul Mission. Once more Afghanistan had scrawled across the page of history her savage declaration of independence in letters of blood and fire.

The Amir—or his people—had scored a point in terrible fashion; but theirs was not to be the last word.

The invading armies must again be put on a war footing. They must strike—and strike quickly. Sir Sam Browne was bidden to re-form his Khyber column; Sir Donald Stewart to stand fast at Kandahar. The Kuram Field Force still crouched vigilant on the Afghan frontier, like a cat watching a half-stunned mouse. Given luck and spirited leadership, it might reach Kabul in five or six weeks; and punishment, to be effective, must be swift.

By good fortune the very man to push it

through was still in Simla. No well-earned Home leave for Sir Frederick Roberts. Without a moment's hesitation, without bargaining for a larger force, he agreed—given picked officers—to undertake a task that few Generals, if any, in India would have cared to face with less than 20,000 men. But he knew there would be two other columns in the field; and he counted on reinforcements from the Khyber when he reached Kabul. Meantime the Amir was informed that a British Army was rapidly advancing to strengthen his hand and punish the murderers of a British Mission.

To Roberts at parting, Lord Lytton gave one clear injunction, 'You can tell them we shall never altogether withdraw from Afghanistan.'

Within a week Roberts found himself on quite another hill-top, in a temporary cantonment of logs and huts. Here, round a shabby camp table, he and his Political Secretary, Mortimer Durand, were gravely conferring with two Afghan magnates—Finance Minister and Wazir—sent from Kabul to discuss the painful situation; and, if possible, to delay his advance; though they cloaked their true aim under fulsome professions of fidelity from the Amir. Roberts could only explain that his orders were urgent; that the honour of his country was in-

volved; and nothing would satisfy the English except a British army at Kabul punishing the murderers. Three columns—he told them—were now advancing in such strength as to make resistance impossible. And the Afghans, openly dismayed, departed in haste, lest these infernally active British might be in Kabul before them.

But British activity had first to contend with lack of transport, and supplies for the half-starved camels and bullocks: reports of forage so short, on Shutar Gurdan Pass, that the battery mules—omnivorous folk—were eating up their own and their comrades' blankets, even the hair on each other's tails. But if deficiencies and anxieties were many, the warlike temper of men and officers atoned for all. In them the spirit of Agincourt lived again; 'the fewer men, the greater share of honour'; and their rousing welcome had given him full assurance that 'whatever it was possible for dauntless courage, determination and devotion to achieve, would be achieved in the face of all obstacles.'

Now it was 'forward' at last—would the Afghans or no: down and up, down and up—the eternal see-saw of hill marching—to the high plateau of Shutar Gurdan, the Pass of the Camels' Neck, less than sixty miles from Kabul.

Dropping down from Ali Khel they entered the gloomy, rock-bound defile, with a horrid sense of mice creeping into a trap: out again to the next

camping ground, and a night's rest by the way. Then on, in not too orderly fashion; crawling like flies up the steep, zig-zag of Surkai Kotal; the roughest marching they had faced since Peiwar. But at last they found themselves on Shutar Gurdan plateau—dead beat, every man and animal; a whole camp to be pitched before any could hope for food or sleep.

There Roberts was dismayed by an embarrassing message from General Baker, at Kushi, that the Amir had just ridden into the British camp, with his eight-year-old son, his father-in-law, and his Commander-in-Chief, Daoud Shah; a suite of forty-five retainers and an escort of two hundred men. For his nominal rule had perished with the Mission. He could trust neither his troops nor his Ministers; and many Sirdars were in open revolt. Secretly he had fled from his pleasure garden at Ben-i-Hissar, and had ridden by night through the Logar Valley to Baker's Camp, confiding in the indulgence of the great Government whose faith in him he had flagrantly betrayed.

General Roberts, himself, was in no mood to welcome a royal mark of confidence, which, doubtless, betokened further anxiety to check his hampered march; nor had he leisure for anything but the stiff task before him. Down from the Camel's neck they zig-zagged, and were lost to view in another stupendous defile, aptly named

the Gate of Hell; out again, and up the rocky Shinkai Kotal, whence they dropped into the gentle Logar Valley. There Kushi—Land of Delight—lay hidden in a long ravine; a true oasis—shade and water, orchards, melon beds, and vines heavy with grapes. Here Sir Frederick Roberts must greet his undesired guest, with whom he was to become dismally familiar as a problem, an embarrassment and a possible traitor in his camp.

Yakub Khan, at two-and-thirty, was a shifty-looking man of Jewish aspect, his furtive eyes bloodshot, his forehead retreating abnormally under a sugar-loaf hat; his moustache and beard masking a weak mouth and chin. Neither Roberts nor Durand were favourably impressed; and in camp he was regarded with a mixture of curiosity and hatred. The Sikhs were restive; and even kindly British officers would most of them have voted for hanging the man who might have saved the Mission if he would. But on the surface all was courtesy and ceremonious exchange of visits; a guard of Scottish troops for the Amir's camp—ostensibly to do him honour, actually to keep an eye on the constant coming and going of messengers, who might well be used to betray the movements of his so-called friends. In any case, he was openly anxious to delay the British advance. But Roberts—hampered every way—had resolved on a bold, if hazardous, for-

ward move, trusting to local headmen for provisions and carriage.

Even so, it was not till the end of September, that he at last felt fully prepared to launch his famous 'swoop on Kabul', described by a distinguished officer who took part in it as 'simply the most daring and brilliant feat of arms performed by any British General since the Peninsular War.' The writer adds: 'I don't think people in England have yet realised what this march was; and I am sure they have never done it justice.' [1]

There were others—inevitably—who criticised Roberts for temerity in marching ill-equipped through a hostile country, with a high mountain range cutting him off from India. Such criticism disregarded the impromptu nature of the whole campaign: an army—unprepared for renewal of war—called upon to invade the most difficult country on earth. That army knew itself fortunate in being led by a General who would not let the grass grow under his feet, while he scratched his head over the next move. Like all born soldiers, he was fully aware that, in war, psychology counts for more than numbers, and he everywhere re-affirmed Napoleon's golden rule for victory, 'to be quicker than the other man'. But he had wisely halted at Ali Khel, to keep the tribes wondering, and to ensure enough supplies at Kushi for a swift forward move. The least

[1] Sir Charles MacGregor.

sign of wavering, once he had fairly started, would be the signal for a combined onslaught that could have one end only—annihilation.

And now, to the enemy without, was added the embarrassment of a fugitive Amir, whom he suspected—rightly or wrongly—of playing a double game. But intent on his one object—Kabul, he kept a cool head, an invincible heart; and the knowledge that he never doubted the issue was worth a regiment to his travel-weary force, now virtually marching *en l'air*. Except for the helio-flash—sunlight permitting, and a runner postal service—Afghans permitting, they lived and moved in a little world of their own, self-supporting, self-contained: a unique achievement of its kind. Warm, clear days and a full September moon conspired with the spirit of their leader to promote the swift advance on which his resolute will was set.

So it came to pass that on October the 5th—less than five weeks after the massacre—his 'Army of Retribution' encamped near the village of Charasiāb—Four Water Mills—twelve miles from Kabul City. Here the open valley was enclosed by a semicircle of hills, through which the Logar river had cleft a steep, narrow ravine. Shadowy figures moving on the sky-line told Roberts that the clans were out in force; yet he knew, for a certainty, that neither devil nor man could stay him from reaching Kabul.

Dawn revealed the whole range of hills alive with Afghans, mainly regular troops, placing their guns with cool deliberation, firing on the cavalry patrol and forcing them to retire. Clearly the road to Kabul was barred by an enemy of unknown strength: regiments massed on the heights, tribesmen lurking among the hills. And to hurl against that unknown quantity Roberts had but his one brigade, augmented by the Gordon Highlanders, detached from McPherson's force, which—owing to lack of transport—was a day's march behind. He could but send back every spare animal to help it on: then—boldly take the initiative. A delay of twenty-four hours might double the opposing numbers; and behind him the road was already blocked. No doubt the enemy knew, from his Afghan 'friends', the position of every regiment and gun, while he knew only that all hung on the success of this first blow; on the 'splendid audacity' of facing fearful odds.

Through the rocky range ahead ran both roads to Kabul; on the left, the defile carved by the Logar river; on the right, a succession of lower, isolated peaks. Guns and infantry thronged the heights above the gorge: and along the hills towards Kabul mounted leaders showed fearlessly on the sky-line, confident of victory.

Swiftly Roberts devised his plan of attack. The formidable strength of that unbroken ridge

told him that the familiar turning movement offered the best chance of success; a feint on the gorge, to keep the enemy in play, while General Baker attacked the main position on the ridge.

To himself he assigned the inactive part of holding the camp with his small reserve; watching through his glasses the hourly fluctuations of that desperate fight, the gallantry of his officers and men against thrice their numbers; distracted by the knowledge that he could not spare them another regiment at need, nor even give them a safe refuge in case of failure. To be racked with fear for the safety of his troops, his sick and wounded, transport and supplies; to fortify outposts and stiffen defences, to devise and supervise every means for lessening their peril—needed a higher form of courage than the valour that leads a storming column or a forlorn hope. 'And no man could have gone through the ordeal more bravely than Sir Frederick Roberts.'[1] Calmly and cheerfully he attended to every detail, while his eyes and mind reverted constantly to the critical engagement among the hills.

And there, on a knoll above the camp, were the tents of his 'friend', Yakub Khan, also watching eagerly, with God knows what of conflicting emotions in his Afghan heart. His own harem was in the Bala Hissar; and he had more than once assured Roberts there would be no

[1] Colonel H. B. Hanna.

opposition from the Kabul troops. But massed guns and regiments on the ridge told an entirely different tale.

The British troops were assaulting it now in fine style—Highlanders, Gurkhas and Sikhs, under cover of the guns, while the Afghans stood to their standards; crouching till a shell had burst; springing up with derisive cheers and firing a volley in return. Then Baker let loose his Gurkhas and Punjabis with such telling effect that enemy troops, massed above the defile, came hurrying back to save the centre; their agile figures making a barbaric frieze along the skyline. But the attack on the centre never wavered; so resolute were the Highlanders, who had carried their colours into battle—a rallying point for the men.

By now, all along the ridge, fighting had become fast and furious. Tenaciously the Afghans clung to their position. In two hours Baker's determined assault had made small impression on their countless numbers: always more and more of them, as if they sprang ready armed from their own rocky soil.

And while the intensified struggle on the left hung almost in doubt, away on the right gallant deeds were in progress that changed the whole current of events. For Major White, with a handful of the 92nd, had turned the false attack, by the defile, into a successful action. Seeing

that the guns failed to dislodge the enemy from the Pass, he resolved to storm the hill and stone breastworks in person. He and his fifty Highlanders charged up the rock slope, in the teeth of a murderous volley. But Afghans fire haphazard; and few were hit. Here and there a man rolled over; the remainder pushed on and up, their green kilts swinging, their intrepid leader well ahead: on and up—till they scrambled over the breastworks and fell with fury on the Afghans, who fled outright.

It was a personal triumph for Major White —not the charge alone: for, on the way up, he had dislodged, single-handed, a group of Afghans crouched behind rocks and firing with precision. Bidding his men stay under cover, he had taken a rifle and stalked the enemy with cool and cautious daring, reached the rock, and sprang so suddenly into view, that the Afghans scuttled like rabbits, in the full belief that the whole fifty were upon them.

'White's Hill' it was justly named; for his gallant exploit decided the day. It enabled him to fling two companies of Highlanders on to the flank of the main body, hard pressed now under the onset of Baker's infantry. Startled and confused by the double attack, the Afghans lost coherence and split in two; half of them flying towards Kabul, the other half rallying to defend their main position. But the back of their stub-

born resistance was broken. Driven at last over the ridge, guns shelling their shattered ranks, they gave it up and were soon in full retreat.

The whole ridge was now in Baker's hands; and White had command of the Nawishti defile.

The last message flashed by the setting sun told Roberts that his army had everywhere triumphed; had captured many standards and twenty guns. Victory was complete. The road to Kabul lay open before him.

The importance of that swift, initial success could hardly be over-estimated; and not least among the day's achievements was the piloting over those precipitous hills of three elephants, two camels and two hundred mules, laden with all necessities of food and warmth for hungry, weary men, who bivouacked on the ground they had won.

To White and Baker were justly accorded the honours of the fight. 'But it is questionable'—wrote one who was chary of praise—'whether that fight would have proved a victory, if those officers—and every man under their orders—had not felt the inspiring influence of their commander's indomitable courage, his unshakeable confidence in himself and them.' [1]

[1] Colonel H B. Hanna.

2

KABUL at last: the famous City of Orchards, so curiously fascinating to the imagination, so disappointing to the eye, except when flowering fruit trees lend her a brittle glory. Southward, the full beauty of Chardeh Valley spread its carpet of cultivation. Long lines of poplars and willows gleamed golden in the autumn sunlight; but the city itself—seen from above—showed little more than a jumble of ignoble, close-packed houses, a few scattered trees, an outer belt of gardens and orchards, and a glimpse of fenced-in roof-tops, where the women of Kabul spend most of their lives. No fine mosques or airy minarets; no distinctive landmark, except the dominant twin citadels, their fortified walls running along the scarp of the hill known as Sher Darwāza—the Tiger's Gate.

But, for the English and Indian troops of Roberts' army—when at last they encamped above Kabul—there was only one landmark of vital interest: the ruined Residency, charred and

bullet-riddled; partition walls jutting sullenly out from a mass of debris, white-washed walls, blood-spattered and pock-marked—a tragic fragment frowning darkly against the unclouded October sky.

Here two officers with their orderlies—a Sikh and a Gurkha—spent a sorrowful morning wandering through ghosts of rooms, littered with half-decayed bodies, bones and skulls. Standing on the only roof intact, they looked up at the arsenal bastion and away across open country towards Ben-i-Hissar and India, their minds full of those doomed men, who had described it all with such enthusiasm not three months ago. Down into Cavagnari's quarters—which alone had escaped the flames—they descended by a covered staircase, its walls blotched with dried blood, that bespoke some desperate struggle. The Envoy's empty rooms had been stripped of everything; chintz hangings torn away from staring walls; window frames wrenched out; floors roughened and defiled with filth. One wisp of yellow rag hanging from a nail, a stray heap of ashes and bones, deepened the prevailing sense of desolation.

With them went a Pathan Native Officer—on leave in Kabul at the time—who had been in the Residency and had carried the first message to Yakub Khan. He told them of brave deeds witnessed by him and others: of two Sikhs—almost

the last left alive—who entrenched themselves in a little room under the wall, and fired through the doorway, jeering at the Afghans: 'Sons of Shaitān, why not come and kill us? How many Afghans does it take to kill two Sikhs?'

Angered by their scorn, a few 'sons of Shaitān' had wormed their way into the next-door room, bored a hole in the wall, and shot the scorners from behind.

'And the people of this town say'—added the Pathan—'that those two killed many Afghans before the devils got them.'

'*Wah illah*!' cried the Sikh orderly in high approval. 'We come now to kill thousands. These devils will be ground to powder by our Generailly Sahib, Bahádur.'

For Sikhs and Afghans have been enemies through the ages; and vengeance, in the East, is a ruthless, uncomplicated affair of burning for burning, wound for wound, unhampered by traditions of humanity and fair play, even in dealing with a savage and merciless people.

But General Roberts had first to consider the more critical problem—what was now to be done with the Amir, who could be no ally, since his power was *nil*? In a soldierly sense his own triumph was complete: a hazardous march crowned with decisive victory, the Amir in his hands, Kabul at his mercy. But his new position

involved him in the network of intrigue, false evidence and ill-will that everywhere confounds the Englishman in his dealings with an Eastern court.

On the 12th of October all was arranged for a formal proclamation of British rule, to be read in the presence of Yakub Khan and his chief Sirdars. But the thorny problem of his own ultimate fate was unexpectedly solved by the incalculable young man himself.

Very early that morning he walked, unannounced, into the General's camp and asked for an interview. Roberts, only half-dressed, admitted him and offered him the one chair available. He took it, and announced, without preamble, that his life was utterly miserable—unendurable. He had come to tender his abdication. Let them send him anywhere they choose, so long as he left Afghanistan for good.

In vain Roberts begged him to reconsider so drastic a decision. He declared it was his set purpose, long brooded on.

'You have seen my people—who could rule over them?' he lamented. 'I would sooner be a grass-cutter in the British camp than Amir of Afghanistan.'

That was conclusive; and Roberts could only insist that he should remain Amir in name till the pleasure of Government was made known. To that he agreed perforce; but he vowed he would

not leave the camp or see his people again; and he begged to be excused from the ignominy of re-entering his own city in the train of a conqueror. His young son would be present, and his four chief Ministers.

He departed seemingly a broken man; and Durand, going later into his tent, found him lying in a corner, his bloodshot eyes full of fear, like a hunted beast. The sight of his abject misery troubled the heart of that kindly young Englishman: and within the week there came into his hands an ironical comment on his superfluous pity—a missive found in the royal zenana, from a Jalālabad Sirdar, acknowledging the great news of September the 3rd, and expressing a joyous hope that 'all other enemies of the true faith would thus be plunged headlong into the whirl of destruction.' It looked, suspiciously, as if the Amir had sent round circulars, inviting congratulation. If so, he had small claim on the natural kindliness of Englishmen.

And while he crouched in his tent corner, the triumphal entry to his capital went forward with blare of massed bands, and shrilling of pipes, glitter of sunlight on lance and bayonet, and the boom, boom of twenty-one guns.

From Siah Sung ridge to the Bāla Hissar Gate, stretched an imposing avenue of troops. Half a mile of cavalry; lances flashing among the trees, bared sabres and crimson turbans; a handful of

9th Lancers in full-dress array. Then mountain guns and the scarlet line of Native Infantry; Gordons, green-kilted and gaitered, Seaforths in tartan trews—two living walls of bronzed and bearded men. Slowly the General, on his white Arab charger, followed by his staff, rode down the avenue, greeted by a fanfare of trumpets, bands and pipes; till he came to the main gateway of the Bāla Hissar. Here his senior regiment, the 67th, occupied the post of honour, and the citadel overhead was manned by dark, stocky little Gurkhas, who fought the Afghans *con amore*, like the Sikhs. Here also the Horse Artillery were drawn up to fire the royal salute. The Union Jack was hoisted to the first bars of 'The Queen' and the thunder of those twenty-one guns. Then the 67th faced about and marched through the Bāla Hissar to the King's Garden, followed by their band and the General with his train of mounted men.

There they assembled in a raised, open pavilion; behind them a scarlet line of soldiers with fixed bayonets; below them, the band making cheerful music. While they waited for the Princeling and his Ministers, a group of Sirdars pressed forward, brilliant-coated, servile and ingratiating; hardly a face among them that did not bespeak sensuality, cruelty and cunning. Only one imposing figure towered above his fellows; simply clad in a long, grey belted coat—

Yakub Khan's General-in-Chief, Daoud Shah, the finest Afghan of them all.

A full hour late the Ministers arrived with their puny Princeling, gorgeous in green and gold. They may have intended no insult, but their welcome was less than cordial; and they listened with inscrutable faces to the announcement that Kabul was not even to be partially destroyed, as in Forty-two. A heavy fine was to be imposed; the Bāla Hissar garrisoned by British troops; a searching inquiry held into the reason of the outbreak, those found guilty to suffer condign punishment. All arms must be surrendered, and no man might carry them within five miles of the city. A British Governor of Kabul would administer justice and punish evil-doers.

If these terms brought no little surprise and relief to a vengeful people, a different kind of surprise awaited the Ministers, when they found themselves formally arrested, for failure to prevent the massacre, and for inciting Afghan troops to oppose a British Army sent up in support of their own Amir. Prisoners they would remain, till the Court of Inquiry announced its decision. Under guard, they were dismissed; and the General, with his suite, took the return journey at a gallop, master of a complicated situation—till the next turn of the wheel.

. . . . .

And while the wheel turned there was work in plenty to be done: housing and provisioning troops, setting up two Courts of Inquiry—civil and military—charged with the uncongenial task of collecting and sifting evidence, in a country where men lied instinctively, and every witness testified against another at the risk of his life. The first fruits of those dreary daily siftings were revealed in many convictions and executions of sepoys and lesser fry, whose stoical submission to their *kismet* moved British onlookers to wish that the four politely imprisoned Ministers could have been strung up instead. But it took time to unravel the tangle of their secret influence and intrigue.

Only one gleam of better things lightened the dismal round: witness from so many sources to the unsurpassed valour of the Guides, that Colonel MacGregor, President of the Commission, was moved to include in his report a tribute worth quoting, since few are now left who remember.

'The Commission,' he wrote, 'has had the extreme gallantry of these few men so forcibly brought to their notice, that they cannot refrain from a humble tribute of admiration. They believe that the annals of no regiment can show a brighter record of devoted bravery than has been achieved by this small band of Guides. By their deeds they have conferred undying honour

not only on their own regiment, but on the whole British Army.'

Those words, brought to the notice of Roberts, resulted in a decree that every man of the escort be granted, posthumously, the Order of Merit for Bravery; that the words, 'Residency, Kabul,' be graven henceforth on all accoutrements of the Queen's Corps of Guides.

At the end of October Yakub Khan publicly resigned his throne; though his destination still remained uncertain: and on November the 1st all troops were removed from Siah Sung into Sherpur Cantonments—after much cleansing and fumigating of Afghan quarters.

Here the force settled down to a daily routine, enlivened by rumours and jealousies and lasting friendships; by an inevitable jumble of the trivial and the serious: on one side Gurkhas making mud pies like children; on the other a gleam of bayonets, where some Afghan prisoner was going to the gallows. In one tent, chaff and anecdotes of the mess table; in the next Yakub Khan at his prayers. On a raised circle of ground a flagstaff flaunted the Union Jack, and bands played cheerful selections. Darkness fell early: 'Lights Out', at ten o'clock, sent everyone to his snug little tent till the morning gun announced another golden autumn day.

But if the troops had respite, Roberts had none. By the Amir's abdication and England's

half-hearted Afghan policy, he found himself virtual ruler of a shattered kingdom, a people bewildered and sullen, uncertain whether the Feringhi meant to go or stay; so that even the friendlier Persian Kazzilbashes feared to do them a service, lest they suffer for it afterwards. To the unfriendly—the vast majority—the presence of that small victorious force amounted to a standing provocation. Yet there it must remain till a new Amir had been found—not in the pursuance of any clear policy, but simply because the bottom had fallen out of the Afghan government; and the British Government had arrived at no decision. With no guiding hint from Olympus, Roberts must contrive to administer justice, to maintain his ascendancy over a half-subdued, wholly inimical people, with troops and resources provided for a punitive expedition.

That he ruled them, and often coerced them, with a high hand, was matter for approval or criticism, according to the personal point of view. Every war raises the same ding-dong of controversy as to the rights and wrongs, the spirit and method of reprisal: a large question outside the scope of this brief record.

In civilised England, a Liberal Opposition could be trusted to make capital out of the many executions, the demolished forts and villages of chiefs who were stirring up trouble, or refusing to sell urgently needed supplies. In uncivilised

Afghanistan, Sikhs and Gurkhas deplored the mildness of British vengeance. There was no understanding these white men; fighting like devils one day; and, on the next, letting themselves be fooled by the most treacherous race on earth.

'Sahib, what manner of warfare is this?" queried a Sikh havildar, in genuine perplexity. 'These people hate you, and you have beaten them. There is only one treatment for such devils —grind them to powder.'

And there were moments when the same fierce impulse visited even good-natured British officers, who had heard inconceivable tales of Afghan cruelty, had seen the bodies of their own dead horribly mutilated. But in action they were constrained by the fundamental decency of their kind.

'We have entered into conflict with a race of tigers,' wrote Colonel MacGregor, Chief of Staff. 'Only by ruling them with a rod of iron will they ever give in'. Yet, in cooler moods, even he queried the wisdom of over-much killing and burning of villages, on the score that it 'exasperates the Afghans and does not funk them. . . In fact, we are thoroughly hated and not enough feared.'

That fanatical hatred was steadily drawing together all factions in a faction-ridden country. The Afghan army had been conquered, but not

the Afghan people. They had looked for retribution swift and condign; their land cleared of the avengers. But this 'pestilential *zubberdasti*[1] little General Sahib' seemed in no hurry to depart. His suspicious zeal in the matter of supplies augured a prolonged stay not at all to their taste. In a puzzled, inimical silence they were waiting on events; their arrogant pride rasped by foreign troops in Sherpur, by the capture of all their artillery and munitions, the burning of villages, the arrest and final deportation of their Amir. Only the fierce impetus of religion, the cry of '*Jehád*' was needed to unite all tribes against the invader. And Afghanistan has never lacked a holy man to stir up the people.

There was one such now at Ghazni, the shrivelled and tottering high priest Mushk-i-Alum, Fragrance of the Universe—a name befitting most of his kind. For all his ninety years, the flame within burned fierce as ever. He had himself seen a larger British army massacred in the terrible passes from Kabul to Gandamak; and he did not doubt that the puny force in Sherpur would meet the same fate. Carried on a bed from village to village, he denounced the English in every mosque, fanning the spark of hatred and fervour to a flame. Everywhere his voice was heard, through fiery messages, calling on chief and peasant to join his standard, to

[1] High-handed.

destroy the pig-eating Feringhi as their fathers had destroyed the armies of Elphinstone. For organizer he had chosen Mahomed Jān—a trained General of artillery, leader of the powerful Wardak tribes round Kabul. Altogether a more formidable foe than he sounded, when the first news of his inimical activities reached Sherpur.

Roberts himself was much concerned just then for the failure of supplies and reinforcements expected from the Khyber. He had undertaken his daring 'swoop' only half equipped, on the understanding that he would be supported by a parallel move from Jalālabad. So far, no sign of help from that quarter. Not that the soldiers had failed him. They were crippled, as usual, by political influences; by the clash between Lord Lytton's eagerness to embark on a distant war and his dismay when its increasing expenses outran his optimistic estimates. So, on Roberts fell the odium of drastic foraging methods that were helping to raise the whole country against him.

On November 25th he returned from one of those drastic forays, and a clash with a rebel chief, to find himself threatened on all sides with dangers that grew more serious from hour to hour. Not in vain had Mushk-i-Alum sown the 'seed of fire'. The Ghazni tribes were 'up'. Mahomed Jān was out with some 20,000 men; *Mullahs*

were bribing the people to combine against the British, by promising them the loot of Sherpur. Every day brought its crop of hydra-headed rumours: accurate information *nil*. The Afghans within his gates and the Amir—now sentenced to deportation—were an added source of anxiety. In order to forestall any desperate attempt at releasing him, he was secretly despatched to India—by Government orders—on December the 1st, followed soon after by three of his Ministers; only Daoud Shah, Wali Mahomed and the Mustáfi being allowed to remain.

For now, from all directions, large armed forces were moving on Kabul; and Roberts—with his two brigades—must strike first if he was to keep the upper hand. Again and again, throughout the war, it was laid on him, by chance or fate, to achieve the impossible. Again and again he accepted the challenge in the spirit of Mirabeau: '*Ne me dîtes jamais ce bête de mot*'.

And throughout those critical days he revealed to none—by sign or word—the nagging anxiety within. Only Colonel MacGregor—an old and tried friend—noticed that he was 'looking careworn'. To the rest—officers and men—life in camp seemed to be going on much as usual: the weather keen and bracing, sport plentiful; heavy snowfalls on the higher ranges, softening the harsh landscape and enhancing the splendour of sunsets over Turkistan: the British Tommy—

sceptical of rumours and sick of inaction—grumbling in characteristic fashion: ' Not a kick to be had from these bally *badmashes.* The Politicals are gettin' their legs pulled. Damned if we ever see another shot fired.'

Their leader could have told them a different tale. Each day brought him fresh proof that the whole countryside was astir like a nest of angry wasps. A good many Generals, so placed, would at once have barricaded themselves in Sherpur and wired for reinforcements. But Roberts kept his confident bearing; sent no ' scare ' reports to Simla; decided, at whatever risk, to get in the first blow.

By way of prelude he ordered a full dress review on the great plain between Behmáru Hills and the lake; ostensibly to present distinguished conduct medals, actually to impress the city people with a sight of his splendid men in full array. For already he had news of an extensive plan to surround Sherpur; tribes from the south to seize all the hills from Charasiāb; tribes from the north to seize Asmai and Kohistan; troops from Ghazni, under Mahomed Jān, to make straight for Kabul, where they would be joined by thousands from surrounding villages. And there was but one way to frustrate the junction of forces from north and south: ' *De l'audace, de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.*' He must handle his five thousand as if they were ten; for

the danger of dividing his small force was less than the danger of being surrounded.

So he laid his plans; and wired to Jalālabad for the Guides. On the 10th he ordered out two Brigades; one under General MacPherson, to prevent the northern tribes joining Mahomed Jān; one under Baker, to march southwards by Charasiāb, then swing round into the Ghazni road and catch the retreating Afghans in rear.[1] By this means he hoped either to crush or disperse Mahomed Jān's main force moving on Kabul. But he reckoned without the Afghan General, who had spies all over the country and was handling the most mobile army on earth. When Roberts launched his Brigades, that army was encamped in Argandeh Pass—not five thousand, as reported, but ten thousand strong; and its leader had plans of his own for slipping out of the Feringhi's net.

On the 10th, MacPherson routed an unexpected force of six thousand Kohistánis; and Baker, pursuing his difficult march, halted eight miles west of Argandeh. But his destined prey had already moved on to Killa Kāzi; so that the two Brigades, making for the Pass, would find that he had neatly slipped between them and Kabul.

Next morning, the 11th, a third Commander entered the field. Brigadier Massy, with a squad-

[1] See map.

ron of the 9th Lancers, 14th Bengal Lancers and four Horse Artillery guns, was ordered to move along the Ghazni road, to link up with MacPherson, and avoid committing himself to action till his fellow General had engaged Mahomed Jān.

To save time and his horses, Massy turned off and cut across country towards Killa Kāzi, unaware that he had been forestalled. As his small force moved down the Chardeh valley, an ominous beating of drums announced Afghans on the war path; and his advance guard reported the enemy in strength, not three miles off: staggering news for Massy, with no infantry supports and clear orders from Roberts as to avoiding independent action.

Common wisdom, plus those orders, called for the swift concealing of his unsupported cavalry and guns, in adjacent forts and coppices, till MacPherson showed his hand. But either he miscalculated enemy numbers, or he hesitated—and was lost.

All in a moment—as it seemed to him—hills and plain were swarming with Afghans, horse and foot and fluttering banners—Mahomed Jān's entire army.

For that astute leader—starting before dawn—had secretly massed all his troops across the Ghazni road, not ten miles from Sherpur; and Massy, in his very grave dilemma, resolved on a desperate attempt to delay the Afghan army, to

warn MacPherson, by gunfire, that his presence was urgently needed in that direction.

Instantly the order was given: round after round of shrapnel pitched into the advancing foe—with no result at all. Down the hill, on either side, horse and foot swept with terrible determination, in the form of a vast crescent, threatening to sever the little British force from Sherpur. The bursting of a shell caused only brief confusion. Then on they streamed again, firing and shouting—one continuous roar, like the sound of an angry sea.

Captain Gough, with his troop, dashed boldly at the leading horsemen and captured a standard; but still the main mass pressed forward. Again and again the guns fell back, the enemy following on in fierce rushes: yells of 'All-*lah*!' 'Bismil*lah*!' with every rush. Thirty dismounted Lancers, firing their carbines, made no more impression than a handful of pebbles on that surging crowd. Neither courage nor devotion could check the steady circling movement——

And then it was that General Roberts, with Sir Michael Kennedy, Chief of Transport, suddenly appeared on the scene.

In full confidence he had ridden out, with his party and staff officers, that he might lead his combined forces to decisive victory. And behold—a sight almost incredible: the landscape swarming with Afghans, visibly and audibly

triumphant; sweeping before them British guns and cavalry—still intact, yet powerless to hold their ground; sweeping on towards Nanuchi Pass, that they must not be permitted to enter, hap what might. For beyond it lay Sherpur, with its depleted garrison, its treasures of ammunition and supplies.

Never had Roberts better reason to bless his remarkable capacity for swift mental adaptability and decision. In a flash he grasped the whole dire situation; sent a flying written message to General Hugh Gough—left in command of Sherpur—to secure that Pass at once; a verbal message to Massy, bidding his hard-pressed cavalry turn and charge at all hazards: a heart-breaking order, justified only by the desperate need to save the guns and Sherpur.

For the cavalry it was a case of 'theirs not to reason why'. Swiftly they wheeled about—a mere hundred and twenty against seven thousand; as desperate a venture as was ever dared. In the teeth of a terrific musketry fire, that small devoted band charged at the gallop, vanished in a cloud of dust and smoke. Surrounded, overpowered by sheer weight of numbers, men and horses went down, and the rest rode over them; no chance, no hope of rescue——

'Then I saw,' wrote Durand afterwards, 'what I hope I may never see again. Our squadrons came out in a shapeless mass, utterly broken,

galloping pell mell: horses without riders, or with riders swaying in their saddles. . . .'

No shame to them. The ground was impossible. The Afghans' loose formation offered no firm resistance. They had faced a foredoomed attempt. In the hell of that gallant, futile charge, they had lost four officers and twenty men; the Colonel of the 9th Lancers, terribly wounded. And after all that, the Afghans, barely checked, swept on again as before. Even to save the guns, their sacrifice had been vain. Lacking infantry, outnumbered forty to one, there was no alternative but continued retreat, by the shortest route, through Deh-i-Mazung gorge above Kabul. For only by holding that gorge could Mahomed Jān be kept out of the city.

Another flying message sped to Hugh Gough: not the Pass but the gorge was to be secured by the 72nd Seaforth Highlanders, without delay. And Roberts—outwardly cool, inwardly raging—must devote himself to the bitter unaccustomed task of directing an increasingly difficult retreat.

Nor was that the worst. Too soon the guns were wrecked in a desperate effort to drag them over a narrow water-course twelve feet deep. Men and horses floundered hopefully into it. But scrambling out of it was 'another story'. A wheeler stumbled and fell. The shaft broke; and the gun stuck fast, blocking the only chance of

egress for the rest. Bravely the horses struggled and strained, till Roberts himself gave the order to unhook and spike the guns. There had already been enough vain sacrifice of life. Followed a terrible scene: men and horses struggling and floundering, or bolting into the nearest village; Afghans in hot pursuit, howling like wolves close on their prey.

Yet, even in that mad confusion of escape, there were deeds of gallantry. Roberts on foot, helping gunners out of the water, was attacked by an Afghan, flourishing his long knife. It looked like certain death: but instantly a Moslem of the 1st B.C. sprang at the big man, and hurled him into the ditch—thereby saving his General's life. Here, also, Padre Adams won his V.C. Jumping into the water-course, he dragged two Lancers, by sheer strength, from under their horses, and pulled them both up the slippery bank. He himself would have been killed for his pains, but that a Staff officer, dashing by, saw his plight and gave him a hand up behind his own saddle.

Fortunate they who cleared that obstacle. The rest fell a prey to ruthless Afghans, who swept through the village, murdering all wounded, stripping and horribly mutilating the dead.

On went the hard-pressed remnant, shepherded by Roberts, to Deh-i-Mazung, haunted by one question—would they find the Highlanders in possession?

They need not have doubted. The 72nd, led by Colonel Brownlow, had doubled out and arrived in the nick of time to seize the village of Mazung. From roofs and covering walls their Martinis poured fatal volleys into an infuriated mob baulked of its purpose and its prey. Such fire—as daunted even *ghazis*—turned them from their course in less than half an hour; and not till afterwards was it realised that MacPherson had a hand in that partial retrieving of a defeat that skirted the edge of disaster. By a rapid, impromptu flanking march, he had caught the main body of tribesmen higher up the valley; had pierced Mahomed Jān's centre, cut off half his army from Kabul, and, by making him change his tactics had probably saved Sherpur.

Roberts himself—having saved enforced retreat from disaster—returned, sad at heart, to find gates barricaded, sentries every hundred yards, men's nerves more severely strained by a day of ceaseless anxiety and rumour than by facing defeat and death—the greater demand eliciting the finer response. Only the cool and confident bearing of Hugh Gough had kept the troops steady in an atmosphere conducive to panic. Fully alive, himself, to the serious situation, he had sent an urgent helio flash to the Guides, at their advanced post, thirty-six miles away.

MacPherson apart, two gleams of successful

achievement alone enlightened the gloom of that fatal day. The forsaken guns were recaptured, thanks to the courage and bold action of Colonel MacGregor. Returning to the fatal water-course with a few staff officers, Horse Gunners and Lancers, rallied by his inspiring leadership, he had found the guns, looted and deserted, had them dragged out, unspiked, and brought back —his own personal trophy—to Sherpur.

Later still, at midnight, the redoubtable Guides —infantry and cavalry—marched in. Warmly and amazedly they were greeted by those who were not sound asleep after a desperate day's work—fellow soldiers, quick to appreciate an achievement worthy of the Guides' tradition. Briefly and simply they told the tale of an adventure neither brief nor simple.

Colonel Jenkins, urgently summoned, had resolved on a mighty effort to cross those thirty-six miles of mountain country in record time; to fight his way, if need be, through encircling Afghan troops. Baggage was left to follow—no light sacrifice in mid-December: and using all their mules for ammunition, they cheerfully set out on that bold venture, marching *en l'air* through hostile country, some seven thousand feet up, bent on reaching Sherpur within twenty-four hours.

From dawn to dusk they plodded, horse and foot along rough hill tracks, hard to discern when

darkness fell; on and on, weary but resolute; till at last the few lights of Kabul and Sherpur twinkled in the dark like stray constellations. Then came the critical moment: a fight at the weary end of their sixteen hours' march.

And behold—'by the kindness of God' (quoth the Ressaldar)—the night being bitter cold, Afghans preferred warm huts to frozen snow. Not a soul was keeping watch on the road by which the Guides came to Kabul. Without loss of a man, or a shot fired, they reached Sherpur, having achieved in those sixteen hours three normal marches—one of them over a difficult pass—in mid-winter weather and in peril of their lives.

The boldness and speed of their coming, and the sense of renewed assurance, lifted men's hearts out of all proportion to their numbers. And to none were they more welcome than to Sir Frederick Roberts in his dark hour. If it meant an extra seven hundred to feed—and another two hundred following with baggage—it also meant nine hundred more to defend his walls. And men of that quality were worth five times their number.

To the Guides their coming meant that at last they were within reach of the detested Afghans, within sight of the Bāla Hissar.

3

NEXT morning, the Sher Darwāza heights were still in the safe hands of the 72nd, but enemy flags waved on the Takht-i-Shah; its steep front scarped and broken into natural *sangars*, whence neither shelling nor direct assault could dislodge *ghazis* in their mood of victory. At sunset Colonel Money signalled that he and his handful of troops could get no farther—the second setback in two days. But Roberts, reinforced by the Guides and Baker's brigade, resolved to try again in greater strength on the morrow: and to Baker the assault was entrusted, with the 92nd Highlanders, Guides and 3rd Sikhs.

His guns spoke early from beyond Siah Sung. Then he sent Guides and Highlanders straight at Ben-i-Hissar ridge. By sheer *élan*, they drove three times their number before them; climbing, and firing as they climbed, under cover of the guns: bayonets making short work of *ghazis* who withstood the assault.

From the flat roof of Headquarters' Gateway,

Roberts followed every detail through his telescope: the infantry opening out like a fan; crack and ping of rifles, echoing from crag to crag; soaring shells, bursting into puffs of smoke that wrought havoc among those dark masses, pressed slowly back and up by the onset of disciplined foes.

For all their stubborn defence, Guides and Highlanders captured the ridge; halted briefly, for mountain guns to come up, then assailed the Takht-i-Shah itself. In that brilliant charge they were joined by Gurkhas and the 72nd; the tall form of Colonel Brownlow always ahead and conspicuous—yet untouched. Though the *ghazis* put up a valiant fight, the stormers were not to be denied: and, as the noonday gun boomed down in Sherpur, a helio flash told Roberts that the Takht-i-Shah was in British hands.

But with news of victory came other news, less welcome. The people of Kabul, it seemed, had joined the holy war. Armed masses were hurrying out to Siah Sung ridge, threatening Sherpur itself. To meet the new danger, MacPherson must retire from Deh-i-Mazung gorge and Massy's cavalry must take the enemy in flank: 9th Lancers again with 5th Punjab Cavalry and Guides. While the two first scoured the ridge, the Guides swept grandly across the valley, riding down the enemy with their wild yell—'Bāla Hissar! Bāla Hissar!': a broken line of racing

horses and gleaming sword-blades. They were out for slaughter. God help the Afghans who got in their way. Caught in mid-career, the Kabulis were smitten on both flanks and effectively scattered; the threat to Sherpur averted; the bitter memory of the 11th wiped out by a signal success. That night officers and men believed they had seen the enemy's full strength—and broken it. The morrow would make victory complete.

But the morrow brought home to Roberts the full numbers and resilience of his ungraspable foe—not only the Afghan army, but the whole Afghan nation, fighters born and bred. Over hills and valleys they swarmed like locusts—seemingly undefeatable as locusts. MacPherson's enforced retirement had given Mahomed Jān his chance to capture Kabul, to secure a strong threefold position, on low-lying hills in the foreground, on the heights of Asmai, and on a certain Conical Hill farther north, the key of his whole astute scheme.

Dawn showed the scarped and peaked outline of Asmai thronged with silhouettes of the execrated enemy; flags from every spur and pinnacle patterned on the brightening sky. Nothing for it but yet another assault by the same fine force —72nd in place of Gordons; nor could Roberts doubt the result, for all the climbing and riding and fighting imposed on his indefatigable troops in the last four days.

The attack opened with a vigorous cannonade. From right and left, from front and rear, Baker's guns pounded Asmai; while the infantry scaled the rocky ridge and seized the all-important Conical Hill—a stepping-stone to the heights. Colonel Jenkins, of the Guides, pushing on, left Colonel Clarke, of the 72nd, to hold the hill; his small party afterwards increased by Punjab Infantry and four mountain guns. In one rush, Highlanders and Guides captured the northern *sangar*, fought their way along the ridge—in the teeth of a fierce defence—and carried Asmai, to the admiration of all beholders.

Meantime, in the village below them, the cavalry were playing a grim game of hide and seek with fugitives and Afghans from the city. There Captain Vousden, of the 5th Punjab Cavalry, won his Victoria Cross by an act of gallantry unique of its kind. Seeing a favourable chance for a charge, he collected two Native officers and eight men. Never even looking to see if they were supported, the eleven headed straight into some three or four hundred Afghans, cutting down man after man, wheeling and dashing about so rapidly that, although two hundred were firing at them, only four were mortally hit. The astonished Afghans fled from the fury of riders obviously possessed by devils; and all the survivors of that valiant band received the Order

of Merit for Bravery, to match their leader's Victoria Cross.

By then the whole of Asmai was in Jenkins' hands: and to all it seemed clear that the day was won. Not until Brigadier Hugh Gough, with guns and infantry, dashed off towards Siah Sung, did Baker and his twelve hundred bayonets —deserted by the tide of victory—realise their dilemma. It was MacPherson who signalled the ill news. From the city heights he alone could discern a forest of standards hurrying through Chardeh valley, in crescent formation, towards the weakly-held Conical Hill. On they swept, a seething crowd, heedless of volleys or shells. Literally mown down, they flowed together again: till it seemed more like contending with some ruthless force of nature than with a human army.

Surging forward, irresistible, impervious, the vanguard planted their standards, in triumph, on a mound two hundred yards from Clarke's Conical Hill: a position so alarming that Captain Spens was ordered to take and hold the mound at all risks. Signals for help were repeated again and again. Baker pushed forward a hundred Punjabis and flashed to Headquarters for three hundred more. Obstinately the Kohistanis held their ground. In a vain and valiant attempt to dislodge them, Spens flung away his life, as a man might fling away a useless weapon in despair:

and the elated tribesmen surged on again, like a breaking wave.

That loss of the hill would mean defeat was cruelly clear to Sir Frederick Roberts, watching it all from his gateway, or pacing up and down while Captain Holdich, R.E., observed and reported the progress of events. He still believed in victory—with Gurkhas on the Takht-i-Shah, MacPherson on the heights above Kabul, all the restless red and green standards gone from Asmai. But suddenly, to his dismay, a whole crop of them—fluttering like poppies in a wind—overran the fatal mound, and the continuing ridge to Conical Hill.

Minutes passed that seemed an eternity. Then the telescope revealed a sight beyond believing: the glitter of lifted Afghan knives on the curve of the captured mound: the British troops still stubbornly resisting—pressed slowly back and down, back and down. No sound of guns: and the silence told Roberts that all must have been abandoned in that terrible emergency. From some unseen quarter, the Afghans must have been strongly reinforced. Only MacPherson could see into the Chardeh Valley: and to him Captain Holdich signalled for news of the enemy.

MacPherson reported, 'More and more Afghans in Chardeh Valley. Large masses advancing from north, south, and west'. And the signaller—a very young subaltern—added his

own graphic comment: 'The plain reminds me of Epsom Downs on Derby Day.'

That spelt defeat—the third within four days: a blow that shook, for the first time, Roberts' clear confidence in the power of his troops to resist these ever-increasing hordes, marshalled by skilful and resolute leaders. Without a sign of his inward turmoil, he faced the fact that all troops must be withdrawn into Sherpur, and he must accept a state of siege, till reinforcements arrived.

Closing the telescope with a snap, he gave his orders for retreat as coolly as he had given them for the advance. Captain Holdich was sent out to recall the Cavalry—five miles off on the snow-covered plain. The signal 'Retire at once' was flashed to Sher Darwāza and Asmai. He himself could only watch, with acute anxiety, the difficult descent from that precipitous height, so gallantly stormed in the morning.

Guides and Seaforths finely supported each other. No haste; no confusion; though the Afghans swarmed down on them, shouting and waving their long knives. Only the dauntless bearing of Colonel Brownlow and Major Campbell kept the men steady. For, on that exposed mountain side, there were many wounded, many fierce encounters and deeds of valour. Only when the foot-hill was reached, they halted. At a given order, both regiments faced about and

fired volley after volley into the thick of their pursuers. It was no mere gesture of defiance. The deadly roll of the Martini lasted a full quarter of an hour, with murderous effect. Then Highlanders and Guides marched proudly back into Cantonments; not a man, dead or wounded, left to the tender mercies of the foe.

And behind them, in the city, Gurkhas from Takht-i-Shah, MacPherson's brigade from Sher Darwāza, were facing, with equal spirit, an ordeal equally severe; retreating through tortuous enclosed lanes, through gardens and orchards; exposed to enemy fire on both flanks, the rear-guard increasingly harassed: an intolerable strain on men worn out with hunger, fighting and exposure. But MacPherson's courage and calm temper, the unfailing steadiness of every officer, saved the retreat from degenerating into a rout.

As they marched through the Western Gate-way, weary and disheartened, there stood Sir Frederick Roberts to receive them. For each regiment he had a personal word of congratulation, of heartfelt thanks that were more than mere words to men who had been all day in peril of their lives, who had looked for victory—and behold, retreat.

At the same hour, through a gap in the weak eastern wall, came Gough's returning Cavalry, still unaware of the worst. They found Pioneers

at work on the defences, under a fine old Subadar, who took the astonished Brigadier aside and told him the disastrous truth: 'All regiments ordered back to Cantonments, Sahib. Our whole army defeated—*killa bund.*'[1]

Gough, incredulous and dismayed, hurried off to the General's quarters to learn the worst. There he found Roberts—returned from the Western Gateway—'not a shadow of disappointment or despondency' in his aspect; accepting the reverse with a schooled equanimity that steadied every officer under his command.

By dusk, the whole contingent was safe inside the walls; but there were many losses to mourn at the dismal end of a day that had opened with the brilliant storming of Asmai.

That night the enemy—twice foiled—occupied Kabul and the Bāla Hissar.

[1] Fort bound

4

The gates of Sherpur closed that night on an army virtually invested, an enforced withdrawal that implied no decisive defeat; though to some it seemed an incisive comment on their own racial tendency to underrate an Asiatic enemy, prone to ' live and fight another day '. The bad news, and their need for reinforcements, were telegraphed to Simla before the inevitable wire-cutting severed them from India—for how long?

Brigadier-General Charles Gough—already urgently ordered to push on from Jagdallak—might arrive by the 20th; and, thanks to their own General's foresight, they need not fear shortage of supplies. There was clearly no cause for dismay. But after five days of incessant marching and climbing, fighting, fasting and watching, the sudden lull wrought inevitable reaction. It was a strange and disturbing sensation to realise their passing loss of liberty. It was keenly humiliating to see Kabul re-occupied, to hear of reprisals on all who had done them service—and

know themselves powerless even to oust the enemy from forts and villages left standing dangerously close to the walls of Sherpur. For when all pickets and sentries had been told off, barely a thousand men were left available to take the field. Their victorious little force had, in effect, been paralysed—brought to bay.

Yet, except for incessant duty and a daily ration of bullets, life in cantonments ran its normal course. The cavalry rode out almost daily. Men and officers ate and drank, chaffed and gossiped, as if the whole vexatious affair were no more than a big picnic: and immortal Tommy Atkins raised a laugh by remarking to a comrade, ' It's the fust time *I* ever 'eard of a bloody General being " confined to barracks " '; a view of the situation which had the germs of wit. The average officer found it simply annoying to be ' potted at by a lot of dirty Afghans, without a chance to return the compliment '. For the Afghans, though dirty, were no fools. They bored holes under the wall and fired from safe pits in the ground. It was erratic fire; but bullets dropping about all day kept men's nerves at strain, as did the constant threat of a night attack; while anxiety nagged at their minds as to the probable duration of this unplanned picnic. They catered eagerly for any stray news of enemy designs. Omens, good or bad, took on undue signficance: not least, the disturbing fact

that Sherpur occupied almost the same site as the old indefensible cantonments of '41, christened derisively, ' the folly on the plain '.

As then, so now, the British had conquered in the field—only to be shut into their own cantonments. True, in '41, the Behmáru heights had been incredibly left unoccupied, while in '79 they formed part of Sherpur—its key position. But the ominous parallel remained: a parallel fully appreciated by their enemies over the way. For the tale of that hunted and massacred army had been dinned by fathers into the ears of their sons; and now, those sons believed that another God-given chance was at hand. There was talk of it among Afghans in camp; and at times that dread possibility haunted the less hopeful and stalwart. One—a soldier of proven courage—admits to lying awake in the dark and bitter cold, ' oppressed by the same recurrent nightmare—a wan procession of soldiers and camp followers, fagged, famished and half frozen, struggling desperately on, the horrible shadow of Death falling across their path at every turn '.

If there were others so oppressed, who can blame them? For they realised now the very present danger of undestroyed forts and orchards, of a swamping rush in darkness—the worst that could befall. But, as a whole, they cheerfully accepted ' misfortune o' war ', and

looked for Gough's brigade to retrieve it. They knew that Roberts had, all along, been contending against unequal odds; and repaid his confidence in them with unshaken faith in his skill, insight and courage—a faith finely expressed by Colonel Macgregor, a man of remarkable intellect and character, alive to all the difficulties involved.

'Roberts has been blamed', he wrote, 'for splitting up his troops and leaving Sherpur barely defensible. It is all very fine to throw stones, but it was impossible to get reliable information; and I certainly think he acted for the best. . . . The fact is that if Massy had not brought on the action of the 11th, the 12th would have seen them all bolting . . . I know a good many men who—on hearing of the wholesale rising—would have shut themselves up in Sherpur at once and called for reinforcements. But Roberts, not a bit disheartened, hit out all round. Only after five days of fighting, he went into Sherpur; and then he telegraphed for only one brigade. . . . No General was ever free from mistakes; but the fortitude and constancy and pluck shown by Roberts, in those dark December days, prove that he is the right grit clean through.'

For that very reason his mind and his days were too fully occupied to let doubts or anxieties prevail. He knew himself safe in regard to supplies; but there were defences to be strengthened;

there was secret anxiety on account of the 'friendly' Afghans within his gates. And anxiety increased, as day followed day without a sign of General Charles Gough's brigade, urgently asked for on December 11th, wired for again on the 14th. Yet, on the 18th, he was reported still at Jagdallak, held up by Ghilzai liveliness and lack of equipment. Fortunately the Kabul Afghans were resting on their laurels, convinced that they had caught the hated British in a trap and could massacre them at leisure; hampered only by the fact that all their guns had been captured by the red-faced sons of Satan.

On the 17th, they thought fit to make a demonstration that should strike terror into the souls of their predestined victims. Streaming out of the city gates—banners flying, tom-toms thrumming, they gathered in familiar masses on Siah Sung, and the slopes of Asmai. It looked like an impending attack in force. The alarm sounded. Trench work ceased. Every man stood at his post, hour after hour, under a bleak December sky—the wind keen as an Afghan knife—awaiting with impatience the attack that never came. The valiant crowd, some 20,000 strong, merely screamed curses and brandished knives; till eight British guns pitched shell after shell into their dense masses. Then they ceased from demonstrating, and fled in all directions, dragging away, by their heels, dead and wounded alike.

All next day mist and cloud obscured the sun. Isolation was complete. No news of Gough; no chance of a helio-flash from the important little post at Lattaband, twenty-two miles away, where Colonel Hudson must hold on to ensure Gough's safety, and join him as he passed through.

Soon after dark, snow began to fall: the air was dense wtih ragged aimless flakes that silted into every crevice, piled in drifts round the ice-cold feet of sentries, over blanketed forms of men, sleeping—or wakeful—at their posts. Moon and stars lent an unearthly beauty to the gleaming shroud that changed all shapes, blurred all angles and transformed mere sentries into ghosts of the sheeted dead. Up on Behmáru Heights, more than a thousand men were lying in the open, officers and sentries stalking among them all night long. But the Afghans, it seemed, had no taste for night adventures, even when favoured with a full moon.

At last a pallid sun, peering through leaden clouds, set the helio flashing towards Lattaband. The signal evoked a quavering gleam, like a light-house ray over stormy waters, that told them the post was safe, that Gough still remained at Jagdallak. Roberts had just time to flash his own message—' Order Gough to advance without delay. This order is imperative, and must not be disobeyed '—when the sun was blotted out; the garrison left to wonder at Gough's apparent

failure to respond, as the Guides had done, in the teeth of all risks.

And there, at Jagdallak, sat Charles Gough, with only four guns and fifteen hundred men —wires cut on both sides, Ghilzais lively on all sides—torn between conflicting commands from Sherpur and Jalālabad. General Bright's 'You are not to advance till you get reinforcement and orders,' had arrived little more than an hour before Hudson's message bearing the urgent command to advance at all hazards. That the hazards were great, he knew; but asking for reinforcements from India seemed like asking for the moon. Difficulties swarmed; the worst of the road lay before him; supplies were almost nil. But Hudson's isolated post was in possible peril; while Roberts clearly needed every available man and gun. That clinched his decision. On the 21st he left Jagdallak, with all that his pack-ponies and sick camels could carry. When —if ever—he would reach Sherpur, depended on the Ghilzais and the gods. . . .

Sherpur itself, on that same day, was paying the last honours to two fine British officers. No volleys were fired over their graves; and the incalcuable Afghan—who would murder the wounded and mutilate the dead—ceased from his persistent attentions while the service lasted. Ten officers lost and eleven wounded within two

weeks was a toll that saddened all, while it increased their impatience for Gough's delayed advent. And among those in the field hospital lay Roberts' old friend, Colonel Clarke, neither ill nor wounded, yet mortally hurt in spirit by the loss of Conical Hill and those four guns. None blamed him, or his fellows: all had done their utmost against impossible odds. But the wound to his soldierly spirit had robbed him of the will to live. He simply lay there, fading away—and died not long after: a sadder end than any death in battle.

Next day their spirits were lightened by news—at last—of Gough's brigade; expected at Lattaband on the 22nd, hopeful of reaching Sherpur on the 24th. It seemed he was short of cavalry: so the invested army must send help to the relieving column. And, as there was little on earth that Roberts would not attempt, the 12th Bengal Cavalry were ordered to start at once for Bhutkak, ten miles off, where Hudson should join them. That bold and perilous adventure has been immortalised by Kipling in his 'Ford o' Kabul River'; but the source of the ballad is known to few.

At half-past three on a bitter December morning—as the old moon appeared above the hills—four squadrons with six British officers filed out of Sherpur. Hills and plain were shrouded in snow. Their horses slipped on sheets of ice, or

stumbled into deep ditches masked with snow. Nearing the bridge over Kabul river, they were startled by shots from an enemy picket. Someone had raised the alarm. Hurriedly they changed their course; and Major Green coolly decided to ford the river lower down: a simple affair by daylight, but in pitchy darkness 'no such matter'.

Down the steep bank they slithered into half-frozen water; but climbing up the far side—slippery with mud and broken ice—was quite 'another story'. For two mortal hours four hundred men and horses kept scrambling up and sliding down, struggling to escape from that icy stream: and when, at last, all were clear, it was found that two sowars only and ten horses had been lost. Their missing riders must shift for themselves; while the dripping squadron hurried on to Bhutkak.

As they neared the village, a pallid dawn was breaking; and a rattle of musketry warned them that Bhutkak was occupied—not by friends. Green, attacked in force, must choose between a desperate attempt to break through, or an equally desperate retreat on Sherpur. It was then that one of his Ressaldars—knowing the district—offered to guide the regiment, by a *détour*, to Lattaband; and in full daylight, they pressed on again, fired at from every village, reaching Hudson's post before noon: as daring

and dangerous a feat as any achieved during the siege.

There they found the little detachment, severely taxed by eleven days of isolation on a snow-bound pass, by the triple strain of semi-starvation, exposure and anxiety, expecting Gough's brigade before dark. Then they must face a march of twenty-two miles, and elude—if might be—the vigilance of Mahomed Jān.

But Mahomed Jān, just then, had 'other fish to fry'. For it was rumoured that a body of mysterious horsemen had crept out of Sherpur, escorting into safety the Generals and Colonels of the doomed army. To Afghans it seemed the most natural proceeding on earth that high personages should thus save their own valuable lives, leaving the depleted force to its predestined fate. Moslem fanaticism had already been inflamed by the wailings and self-lashings of their great tragic festival, the Mohurrum. On the 23rd that orgy of lamentation would be over—till next time: and before fresh troops arrived they would launch their long delayed assault. Then they would deal faithfully with the new-comers.

The omens were good. Scaling-ladders had been prepared for a false attack on the south-western walls, while the main assault would capture the eastern trenches and Behmáru village. With true tactical instinct, they had chosen Sherpur's weakest side, not reckoning that the

same instinct would cause the British General to defend it in fullest strength; and they decided to attack at dawn, when sentries, vainly watching, might be weary and off their guard. For signal, a beacon fire on Asmai, to be lit by the sacred hand of Mushk-i-Alum. Then would the pig-eating Feringhi—startled out of slumber—see what he would see . . .

But the Feringhi—no fool and favoured by his gods—had his own shrewd suspicions, confirmed that evening by news of the assault from a trustworthy Afghan Ressaldar: news that came as a relief, though it might mean a life-and-death struggle against impossible odds. Promptly a message was sent to Gough bidding him double-march straight to Sherpur without halting at Bhutkak; and all plans were duly laid for the 'surprise', which would be no surprise at all.

A night of frost laid a spell of utter stillness on their ghostly world. Sentries of the 72nd could hear the soft scrape of scaling-ladders dragged across frozen snow, the shuffle of sandalled feet—thousands and thousands of them—hurrying out of Kabul city. Their own guns were in position to surprise the surprisers. And as the sky lightened, all eyes were turned towards the majestic bulk of Asmai, ink-black against the dusk of morning. A worn-out moon drooped above the western hills, as each regiment silently fell in. Reserves stood to their arms. Men held

their breath, longing for the relief of action—at last.

And, on Asmai's rock summit, where snow lay three foot deep, old Mushk-i-Alum—carried up the night before—was applying his torch to the pile of wood and damp gunpowder: his frail body shaking with ague and fanatical exaltation.

A crackle of sticks, a puff of wind, and the darkness was rent by pennons of flame rushing together; a blaze of light so dazzling that it lifted men's hearts in astonishment and awe. Every watcher saw some fragment of the illumined scene; but only those on Behmáru ridge saw the whole glorious and terrible spectacle. 'At their feet—every nook and corner clearly visible—lay cantonments; and across the snow-clad valley . . . every line and rock of the precipitous Asmai Height seemed traced by a pencil of fire. Enemy figures—dark against the snow below and the light above—were just starting into fierce motion, ready to break through the obstacles that lay between them and their hated foe.' [1]

Less than five minutes the wonder lasted. Sudden as it had flared, it died down; and the pre-dawn pallor seemed, by contrast, dark as midnight. For a long moment—dead stillness reigned. Then a shot rang out from Deh-i-Afghan, another from the King's Garden; sig-

[1] Colonel H. B. Hanna.

nals for the false attack. A crackle of musketry and the rush of scaling parties, were answered from Behmáru ridge by a flight of star-shells; each, as it rose, lighting up hundreds of dark, fierce, eager faces.

Below these heights—entrenched behind log barricades bound with telegraph wire—the Guides were ready for the onslaught that was to overwhelm them. Between paling sky and dead white earth hung a shifting curtain of mist. Through it came shadowy masses, barely discernible, hideously audible: rending the air with their battle-cry, '*Allah-il-Allah!*': a roar so menacing, so terrific, that it seemed as if half the throats of Afghanistan yelled defiance.

And the Guides' officers knew those advancing hordes must be checked afar off, lest they break through by sheer weight of numbers. So the order was given; and the long line of rifles poured a hail-storm of bullets, into the half-seen enemy at a thousand yards range: a turn of the tables fatal to undisciplined troops.

At once they broke up into fragments. Some pressing on through the bullet-storm, hurling themselves on the *abatti*, tearing vainly at tough telegraph wires: others dispersing into villages and orchards, to await the day. They would come on again: and they did—infuriate *ghazis*, 'conquerors of death', upheld by the belief that infidel bullets could not harm them nor infidel

bayonets pierce their flesh. But the first collective impulse checked in mid-career, would never be revived.

When the sky lightened, they emerged from the mist, howling and waving their long knives. Again and again, in spasmodic rushes, they assailed the *abattis* and Behmáru village, only to recoil before the withering fire of Mountain Guns, Highlanders and Guides, the steady reserved fire of the 67th.

As mists dissolved and light increased, the awful beauty of a night assault gave place to the hideous holocaust of battle by day. For now, on all sides, the garrison was hotly engaged. Though gun-fire decimated the assailants, their numbers—as always—seemed to increase: their onset, though desperate now, remained fierce as ever . . .

And while the struggle was at its height the longed-for relieving column had reached Bhutkak and signalled for orders—already sent, and presumably received. In any case, the sound of heavy firing from Kabul told them of conflict and danger; yet, at the Logar bridge, only six miles from Sherpur, the Brigade again halted, and again signalled.

Drifting clouds intercepted the reply; but Gough had been summoned many times over. He had found the bridge undefended; gun-fire had been distinctly heard; and ' the sound of cannon,

after all, is the surest guide on the battlefield.' Had he secured the bridge with part of his force, and dashed with the rest at Siah Sung heights, he would have created a valuable diversion, and 'added a chaplet to his laurels'. For reasons known only to himself, he let slip the chance of that soldierly achievement: yet the mere presence of his brigade had its effect on the fortunes of the day.

The winking of the heliograph told Mahomed Jān of an approaching force; and the news spread like fire through stubble. Hundreds of Afghans began slipping away betimes from impending defeat. But, on the Behmáru side, they clung obstinately to the one village they had captured. Even the hottest fire failed to dislodge them. Then it was that Roberts let slip his Horse Artillery and Punjab Cavalry, through the gorge that split the ridge, with orders for a sharp flanking turn to the right.

Moment and action were supremely well judged. At the threat of guns and cavalry, Afghans began stealing out, by scores, on the far side of the village. And as the infection spread, retreat became a rout. General Massy, with every available horse and man, dashed through the gorge, to whip up the remnants that remained. But five thousand Kohistanis were already in full flight back to their hill country—not men alone, but stout-hearted wives and

sisters and mothers who had come out to witness the triumph of their clan.

The morning's high tide of confident victors had ebbed to a broad black stream of the defeated, followed up by the wounded and weary —an erratic design of black patches and dots on ghostly snowfields under a grey sky. And, behind them, the trampled, and blood-spattered snow was blotched with shapeless mounds of their many dead—too many to carry away.

That was the beginning of the end.

So rapid was the rout, once begun, that the greater number fled unscathed, though all the cavalry were out; and Baker—with his infantry and guns—lost no time in destroying enemy forts and villages. Out of each as it was stormed, ran hundreds of Afghans, only to encounter the sabres and carbines of pursuing Feringhis, no longer ' confined to barracks '. Southward—the 9th Lancers and 5th Punjab Cavalry; northward, the 14th Bengal Lancers. Towards Bhutkak, the Guides awaited them—still busy wiping out scores. East and south-east, cavalry scoured the country, till snow began to fall, hampering pursuit, gently shrouding three thousand unburied dead.

For seven hours, without covering guns, those *ghazi*-led thousands had hurled themselves against unyielding walls and bastions: yet not one of them had so much as entered Sherpur.

Lacking the cohesion needed for a prolonged siege, they had staked their all on one throw—and lost. As an army they had automatically dissolved—till next time. As an armed people, they would continue to possess the land, waiting for a fresh impetus. For the present, British troops had won the right to occupy as many square miles as their guns could cover. But even they could not remain for ever.

That night, every man in Sherpur knew that the siege was ended. Next morning, not an armed Afghan was to be seen. Even Kabul and the Bāla Hissar were reported empty of the late enemy, whose numbers, but yesterday, had been roughly reckoned at 60,000 men.

So collect, so vanish, the yeoman armies of Afghanistan: to-day swarming in from every corner of the kingdom; to-morrow dissolving like snow in spring. In their very mobility lies their strength. The British might turn to good or bad account their passing pre-eminence. The last word would rest with Afghanistan.

PHASE THREE

I

ANOTHER year had begun. January 1880, saw British troops again in the wrecked Bāla Hissar; a British General supreme again in Kabul—almost as if no rising had ever been. There seemed little to show for all the violence and valour, the endurance and the death-roll of the past eventful month. Though the tribes had been scattered, Mahomed Jān, with a large force at Ghazni, threatened to return in the spring.

And still, in the background, loomed Russia, the sinister cause of it all. No sign yet of any clear policy from a Home Government faced with the embarrassing problem—what to do with Afghanistan now they had got it. Nor was the problem eased by the threat of an imminent General Election that might bring Gladstone and his disapproving Liberals back to power. Though talk of annexation was in the air, there were now few Conservatives who went beyond advocating a permanent hold on Kandahar—

India's main bulwark against the Russian menace, in which Liberals did not believe.

In Kabul itself, the men on the spot could only 'carry on' till some decision emerged, or some promising new Amir, to whom they could hand over their thankless task. For most of them, by now, had arrived at the unflattering conclusion that the less the Afghans had to do with their British friends, the better they would like them. An amnesty, issued after the siege, had brought in many sirdars of varying quality and sincerity: the better sort aiming at power and positions of trust, for their own aggrandisement; the lesser sort—slaves of ease and sensuality—siding with any winner, for comfort's sake; asking little of life beyond the satisfaction of bodily needs—'pillaus and pillows, cakes and concubines.' These last were of small account either way. The other sort were given courteous treatment, but not positions of trust.

Roberts, himself, had had his hands strengthened by welcome telegrams of congratulation from Lord Lytton and the Queen, expressing their complete confidence in him: and he needed every ounce of his country's backing in his difficult double *rôle* of full civil and military command: administering justice, reassuring the people, strengthening the defences of Sherpur and the Bāla Hissar. Few, even among his fellows, realised the unceasing strain of that

double demand on the man whose faith and serene lucidity of spirit upheld him through striving and achievement, through good report and ill, to the day of an utterly unexpected end.

In March, sun and rain dissolved the heavy winter snowfalls, clothed hill and valley in a spring garment of young leaves and flowers. And the passing of winter brought other changes: the Kabul garrison strengthened from six to twelve thousand troops; a new Political Officer from Simla, with a decisive ' policy in his pocket ', that amounted to a virtual breaking up of the Afghan Kingdom—its normal condition, except under an Amir-i-Kabir. Herāt should revert to Persia, or remain independent under Ayub Khan—the Afghan's Prince Charlie, who might, at any moment, make a bid for Kabul. Kandahar would be given over to a friendly Sirdar, Shere Ali, supported by British troops; the North—Kabul and Kohistan—to any Barakzai chief, who could be sure of a strong following. When all was agreed upon, the invaders would withdraw, having taught their troublesome neighbours a lesson and possibly learnt one in the process. Afghans themselves were in a mood, just then, to accept any reasonable settlement that would rid them of British dominion: and already their man of destiny was knocking at the door.

Abdur Rahmān Khan—cousin of Yakub, grandson of Dōst Mahomed—had emerged from a twelve-year exile and crossed the Turkistan border, with probable designs on Kabul. Troops sent to oppose his advance, had gone bodily over to the strong man, who had already made himself master of Afghan-Turkistan. More: the new Political, Mr Lepel Griffin, had instructions to encourage his bid for the throne. Approached by letter, he looked like coming to terms—his own terms, for choice: but he was clearly waiting on events. And while he tarried, a change of Government in distant England affected him and his people more actively than they were able to understand.

The turmoil of a General Election—with Afghan affairs for a prominent party question—had resulted in the return of Gladstone and his Liberals; a death-blow to the Beaconsfield forward policy. Lord Lytton must perforce resign—leaving all he had striven for very much in the air; though, by now, both parties were almost equally anxious to withdraw from the hornets' nest, provided retreat could be carried out as a voluntary movement, with a reasonable hope that their departure would not be a signal for the renewed activity of Russia, whose extensive designs on India had been revealed by correspondence found in Kabul, not only with her Amirs, but with the chiefs of Scindia, Kashmir and

Mysore, inciting them to open rebellion; a discovery that enhanced the importance of a friendly Afghanistan and a reliable Amir—if there were any likelihood of attaining either.

Spring also brought changes of command in the Army of Occupation, not without effect on after events. Early in April Sir Donald Stewart started from Kandahar on his adventurous march to Kabul. There he arrived on May the 5th—having fought two successful battles *en route*—and took over supreme command of North Afghanistan; his forces now grouped into two divisions—one under General Ross, the other under Sir Frederick Roberts, automatically superseded by the advent of a senior General. It was a change not entirely welcome to one who had so long exercised supreme power. But happily Sir Donald was a personal friend; and tact on one side, loyalty on the other, enabled the two men to work in perfect harmony. Roberts—with the return march in view—devoted his abundant energies to re-organizing transport, while Sir Donald and Lepel Griffin carried on a long-drawn political flirtation with the unseizable Abdur Rahmān, who alternately would and would not come to claim his throne.

At last—in late July—Griffin decided on the simple expedient of publicly proclaiming him Amir, with a trifle of ten lakhs, handed over to

his ministers, to help him establish his authority. By that time, war-weary, camp-weary British officers and men asked only one boon of the gods and the Government—the date of their departure.

But still the announcement tarried, though Liberal statesmen made no secret of their eagerness to withdraw at almost any price: and Afghans—unversed in the see-saw of party politics—concluded that the British were not strong enough to carry out their presumable plan of conquest: a belief that prevails to this day.

Early August had been named as a likely date: and Roberts—who was to return through the Kuram—had gone off on a riding tour towards Jalālabad; wishing to see for himself those four passes made famous by the awful retreat of '41. Thence he intended riding on to the Khyber. But before leaving Jalālabad, he was assailed—as once before—by so sudden and strange a foreboding of disaster, that, instead of riding on, he rode swiftly back to Kabul; arriving on July the 29th, to be greeted by tragic news just received from Kandahar.

A telegram from General Primrose, in command, reported 'Total defeat and dispersion of General Burrows' brigade. Heavy loss in officers and men.' That hapless force—some 2,500 strong—had been sent seventy-three miles up the Helmund valley, with the laudable intent to

check Ayub Khan, advancing from Herāt at the head of 8,000 regular troops. The Kandahar garrison, it was further reported, had been withdrawn from cantonments into the Citadel, and were preparing for a state of siege. Clearly the day of departure was—not yet. That incredible news would involve the sending of a relief column to invested Kandahar, a full three hundred miles away, in the most blazing month of the year.

Remained only one question—should troops be sent from Kabul or from Quetta through the Bolan Pass? Both Roberts and Stewart favoured a force from Kabul, composed of British and Indian troops, already seasoned to Afghan fighting. There were others who denounced the proposal as ' the maddest thing out ', and urged the importance of ' localising the war '. But the last word was with Simla: and Simla favoured a force from Kabul, 10,000 strong, General Sir Frederick Roberts to command.

Sir Donald Stewart, who might have led the force himself, had preferred to recommend the friend whom he had unwillingly superseded, who was clearly the man for so bold and swift an undertaking. More: Roberts had the pick of all the Kabul regiments to form his division. ' It is only fair '—was Stewart's soldierly view of the matter—' to give Bobs the best of everything, to risk as little as possible.' And Roberts' own work

on the transport—like his strange return—seemed an instinctive preparation for the unforeseen event. There it was, now, ready in every detail—an element vital to success.

Happily anxiety was short-lived as regards the possible effect of so grave a British reverse on the new Amir, who had only arrived in person on July the 31st. Abdur Rahmān Khan, a burly but prepossessing Barakzai, intelligent, courteous and seemingly frank, had no inclination to play the game of his one serious rival, Ayub Khan, who had made the mistake of his life by stopping to fight Burrows, instead of marching on Kabul with his ten regular regiments and thirty guns. Nothing would better suit the Amir than his cousin's defeat at the hands of the British. The Maiwand disaster put an end to his see-saw tactics. By detaining Ayub, it helped to settle matters at Kabul more effectively than weeks of political flirtation or reams of correspondence with Simla.

As for the Kabul troops—sick of delay, longing for India—their first natural impulse was to curse, in good set terms, those who were responsible for the reverse and for the eleventh-hour change of plan. Neither officers nor men could all at once grasp the magnitude of that disaster. But as details came through, and the worst was revealed, they rose—in true soldierly spirit—to the obvious duty of retrieving the reverse and

saving Kandahar; to the honour of being included in a picked force under a leader whose name was a guarantee of victory.

2

THE story of Maiwand makes cruel reading: a story of soldiers launched on a vain expedition, without due regard to military needs: of twelve hundred lives lost through wrong strategy at the outset, wrong moves at every turn of affairs.

It was an order from the Simla Government—disapproved by the Commander-in-Chief—that unwisely sent Burrows, with his inadequate force, seventy-three miles up the Helmund valley to join Kandahar's British-supported Governor, for the purpose of intercepting Ayub Khan—best of Afghan Generals—and his formidable army. A lament from General Primrose that his garrison would be dangerously weakened, evoked an order for extra troops from Quetta—that never arrived. As for Burrows—all that could go wrong, did go wrong with his unhappy Brigade.

The Wàli, Shere Ali, with infantry, cavalry and guns, was on the far side of the Helmund, collecting revenue in forcible Afghan fashion; intending to cross and join the British force, when

it reached a point opposite his camp at Ghirishk. But his troops—directly the order was given—broke into open revolt, seized baggage, guns and ammunition, plundered the fort—where stores had been collected for Burrows—and bolted off to join ' Prince Charlie '. The cavalry alone remained loyal; and a small British force, sent over the river in pursuit, captured guns, camels and baggage. But the co-operating army had melted away; an unforeseen dilemma that changed the whole situation.

On the heels of that dilemma came unexpected news of Ayub Khan, who had reached the river—that he positively must not be allowed to cross—at a point only three marches away: a turn of the wheel that called for the swift adaptability and bold decision of a Roberts. That Burrows lacked both qualities, and had no active service experience, was his misfortune, not his fault. Harassed by telegrams from Simla, *via* Kandahar, confused by alarming reports—difficult to verify—by divided opinions in his small council of war, he fatally decided neither to advance, nor stand fast, but to retreat, on Kushk-i-Nakhúd, half-way back to Kandahar. In war, as in life, half-measures are fatal. Retreat, if unavoidable, should have been right back to his base. But it is said that yet another telegram from Simla was responsible for that ill-advised move; and an officer who suffered from it, wrote caustically

afterwards: 'Playing chess by telegram may succeed; but planning a campaign on the Helmund from the cool shades of Simla is an experiment which will not, I hope, be repeated. Burrows, before the battle, was in almost daily receipt of telegrams which left him little independent judgment . . . Trammelled by contradictory instructions, he had much excuse for the indecision he displayed.'[1]

So back the soldiers tramped in the fierce July heat, from a position whence, at least, a watch could have been kept on Ayub's advance. Instead, all trace of him was fatally lost; not to mention the bad effect, on Asiatic troops, of appearing to retreat before an enemy. Even the fine 66th[2]—who had left Kandahar in high fettle—were disheartened by the backward march: no shade and little water; the sun, a ball of molten metal, glaring through a haze of dust that obscured the sky.

And, behind them, Ayub Khan had crossed the Helmund, unchallenged. He was hurrying his huge army, unseen and unheard, towards Maiwand.

To anticipate him was clearly a matter of vital importance. Yet Burrows stood fast for three days, apparently waiting for more exact intelligence. It reached him in the form of a startling discovery that the army, which should have been

[1] Personal Records: Major Ashe. [2] The Berkshires.

miles behind, had stolen a march on him, and might forestall his plan of action. Then, at last, the order was given to start next morning for Maiwand, though several officers on his council urged an immediate move. No attempt was made to discover if there had been a change in enemy plans; and the Brigade spent its last peaceful night in ignorance of the fact that Ayub Khan's army was now within twelve miles, ready to intercept it on the morrow.

That false start was but the beginning of sorrows: men and animals dead weary, the cavalry worn out with constant patrolling, the whole Brigade encumbered with 3,000 baggage animals and followers to correspond. A haze, shrouding earth and sky, only intensified the sun's power; loose sand burned their feet and rose in suffocating clouds under the churning of wheels and the tread of tramping men. Not until the midway halt did Burrows definitely know that he had been out-manœuvred, and had lost the initiative—the only begetter of victory.

Even on arrival, his position was dictated, like all else, by the Afghan General, whose carefully-screened flank march revealed strategy of no mean order. A *cul de sac*, enclosed by hills, gave good enemy cover. On the right a ruined fort was commanded by the spur of a hill. On the left a deep ravine skirted the road; and beyond

it, the great plain of Maiwand stretched away to the hills. Making the best of a bad bargain, Burrows massed his main body round a ruined village: his guns, under Major Blackwood, were placed at intervals along the front line; his one British battalion—the 66th—part in the centre, part on the left flank, with five companies of Jacob's Rifles, a Belooch Regiment, imprudently under-officered; on the right flank a regiment of Bombay Grenadiers. The slender body of cavalry was, perforce, split up, part behind the guns, part behind either flank. There were no reserves; each corps being too heavily outmatched to help the others. In all, he could muster but twelve guns, with a bare 2,400 men, horse and foot, to assault an enemy who had the advantage of him in every way—numbers, weight of guns, skilled manœuvring, and choice of position. Even so, he was sustained by an instinctive British belief in victory.

Guns and cavalry, lured through the ravine—as he afterwards recognised, by a skilful ruse—had the first taste of attack, the first revelation of Ayub's 'countless numbers'. In support of them, the whole main body marched through the ravine on to the great open plain of Maiwand; and there, for a time, the guns made good practice; while Ayub—emerging from the hills—deployed regiment after regiment into an imposing battle line. Six batteries of thirty guns were

spaced along a centre of seven infantry regiments with three in reserve; more guns on every vantage ground: on the right some two thousand cavalry; on the extreme left a swarm of irregular horse, supporting thousands of white-robed *ghazis*. These, resting on a branch of the ravine —that now lay fatally behind the Brigade— awaited only the given word to rush in fearlessly, front, flank and rear, since they could not be fired on from all sides at once.

A brief gun duel did little harm either way, owing to the haze. Then—the signal, swiftly and skilfully obeyed.

Circling, in scattered order, the terrible Afghan horsemen steadily enveloped the British left and threatened the unwieldy horde of baggage animals, already attacked by *ghazis*, who now swarmed out of the ravine. And high on the ridge—that should have been held by British guns—a throng of irregular horsemen waved their banners as they fired into the troops on the plain.

Now it was that Ayub's main centre moved forward, covered by the galling fire of his thirty guns, thrusting back the left flank, till it formed a dead angle to the 66th, who still pressed on unshaken—now advancing, now lying down, to escape showers of *mitraille* from Afghan shells. Behind them rode Colonel Galbraith, conspicuous on his iron-grey Arab, giving his men a

cheering word or a brief order: 'Fire low and steadily. Afterwards the cold steel.'

A target for sharp-shooters, he was favoured with three bullets in quick succession. But in vain his Adjutant begged him to dismount; in vain Burrows sent him a message to that effect.

'No, my dear fellow,' was his characteristic answer, 'my men must see their Colonel as they always see him on parade, mounted and conspicuous—to them as to the enemy.'

And he continued so to ride—unharmed.

But while the centre held firm, Ayub's infantry was now forcing back both weak flanks, while *ghazis* and irregulars, streaming along the ridge, fell furiously on the rear-guard and baggage, creating wild confusion—the horrors of a lesser Sedan. Under that ceaseless rain of shot and shell, even brave men began to lose heart. Yet in a passing lull, one unquenchable subaltern lit a cigarette, perhaps to steady his nerves against the strain of fighting on an empty stomach.

'Oh, for one hour of Roberts!' he cried, pulling out his six-shooter. 'We're in a bloody mess. But a man who could handle troops would soon get us out of this rat-trap. Anyhow we'll give 'em another round or two before they come at us again.'

Many more rounds were given: the guns, hard-pressed, served with a coolness 'beyond all praise'. But they were only twelve against

thirty, handled with a skill that suggested the training and possible presence of Russian officers.

It was after two o'clock—the sun at its maximum, men's endurance strained almost to breaking point—when Ayub, master of the field, gave his orders for a general attack on all sides at once.

The guns ceased fire; and there sprang from folds in the ground—as it were rising out of the earth—a very cloudburst of *ghazis*, the dread, familiar 'conquerors of death'; most of them big, powerful men; long white robes blown backward: right arms flourishing naked blades.

On they came, with their wild '*Allah-il-Allah*'! carrying along the whole front line, rushing the unsupported Horse Artillery guns. Two of these were taken and re-taken, after a hand-to-hand struggle as fierce as any that day. Young Osborne, R.H.A., came gallantly to the rescue of Major Blackwood and a fellow-gunner set upon by a murderous swarm of *ghazis*.

On his powerful charger he forced his way, by sheer impetus, through that living wall of turbaned swordsmen; creating a diversion from the attack; giving the gunners a chance to limber up and gallop to the rear, where they re-opened fire, just as their brave subaltern—wheeling round to rescue the second gun—was struck down by a random shot.

But it was the weakness of both flanks that crippled the Brigade on that 'day of tarnished

glory'. For between the gunners and part of the 66th were the Jacobs Rifles; their one remaining subaltern killed, two senior officers wounded; their courage severely tested by affinities of race and religion. Now they began throwing away their arms, adding dismay to confusion, pressed back towards the baggage in the rear, where plucky *bhistis* and doolie-bearers[1] went seeking the wounded; the less valiant dropping their helpless burdens and fleeing for dear life.

But the gunners still stood firm. Major Blackwood's horse had been shot under him; and he—a bullet in his thigh—pulled himself up with the help of a deserted doolie. So standing, heedless of pain, he went on directing the fire, encouraging the shaken Rifles, under their one Jemadar, to make some sort of stand against patently impossible odds; ordering his trumpeter to go in search of water—the desperate need of all.

Flinders, hastening to obey, saw a scared native cook crawling under a waggon for safety—just not in time. A round shot sliced off his knee-cap; and he, screaming with agony, promised Flinders his watch and all his money for a drink. Flinders—needing no bribe—ran hopefully to a fallen camel laden with *mussacks*[2]. But the camel was dead, the *mussaks* were shot through. Nowhere could he beg or steal one life-giving drop

[1] Palanquin. [2] Water-skins.

of water. From his fruitless search he returned to find the unhappy cook dead, his watch and money stolen. Brave Major Blackwood, forced to succumb, had been carried away to have his wound dressed. And the endless fight raged on. Four hours now since it began—hours that might have been years: the sun fiercer than ever; dust and heat and thirst overpowering.

Of all that doomed Brigade, only the 66th still pressed bravely forward; piercing, like a Spartan phalanx, the clouds of horse and foot that fired and slashed and shouted on every side. Pushing on, unsupported, towards the ridge, Galbraith and Major Oliver found themselves, with only four companies, in the midst of a *feu d'enfer*: six batteries sweeping the slopes, plus a galling fire from four thousand rifles, mercifully ill-aimed. There was no choice but dogged retreat by the old manœuvre of alternate wings. Twice Ayub's horsemen charged at them. Twice the Colonel's order rang out: 'On the centre sections—form squares! Prepare for cavalry!' Along the slant line of bronzed tubes ran a sheet of flame: and proudly-advancing horsemen bit the dust before those adamantine squares.

Back and back it was, none the less; while Burrows himself did all that a defeated man could do to retrieve the irretrievable. But he was out-matched in every way. He had not enough British troops; and he himself was un-

fitted for the demands of so desperate a crisis. Brave as the bravest under fire, he saved three men's lives that day, and would no doubt gladly have lost his own. Too late, like all else, he at last gave the order to fall back on the village, their original base—an order more easily given than obeyed. The left flank—what remained of it—had been reduced to chaos: Jacob's Rifles rolled back by *ghazis* on to the panic-stricken Bombay Grenadiers, who at once fell to pieces, do what their officers would. Jammed together, unable to use bayonet or rifle, many were dragged into the open and hacked to death.

Only the decimated 66th—dazed with heat, mad with thirst—still held together. But now their steadfast line—thrust forward by the shock of two broken regiments behind them—gave way at last; and half of them, entangled with yelling *ghazis*, pressed blindly on, edging away unconsciously from the rest of the broken Brigade. Even so, they still kept enough cohesion to resist the enemy. Surging across a deep nullah, they scrambled up the far side, their numbers thinned by the loss of sixty officers and men. Here fell the dauntless Galbraith, colours held aloft, cheering on his shattered remnant to the last.

For the hundred who survived, no breathing space was vouchsafed to mourn the dead or help the wounded. On they must go, still carrying the colours; on to a walled garden where some

sort of stand could be made. There, at last, they faced their pursuers, with bullet and bayonet: three brave subalterns and the sergeant-major, each in turn holding up the colours; till the hundred had dwindled to a couple of officers and eight men. Charging out of the enclosure, that had become a shambles, those ten, back to back, held off the *ghazis* till the last man was shot down—and 'their name liveth for ever'.

The main body—a chaotic jumble of fugitives—had at last reached the village, where a rough enclosure offered partial shelter from the pursuing horror: stout mud walls twenty feet high; within them, a banquette of cases and casks, enabling men to fire over the top, while officers pulled their ruined battalions into some kind of cohesion; Major Oliver—in spite of his wound—rallying all that remained of his own regiment. Outside, the cavalry charged and charged again. From hollows in the ground rose the terrible Afghan horsemen, sweeping all before them: and soon after four, the *ghazis* tried a concerted rush to carry the place by storm. Ammunition was failing; but British officers, standing on the walls, hurled great fragments of stone on to the holy ones, who scrambled up and over, with wild cries and demoniac gestures. Hand-to-hand, men and officers grappled with those lithe and sinewy fanatics, by throat or beard; knives and bayonets in deadly clash.

Twice they were beaten back; their bodies, alive or dead, hurled down from the walls: shouts of defiance, yells of rage—a barbaric strophe and antistrophe.

Then the beleaguered few saw, to their unspeakable relief, an escaped British gun, with its detachment, set upon a point of vantage, whence it opened fire on the assailing hordes—separated, at the moment, from their own artillery. That providential gun spurred Burrows to a desperate attempt at retreat along the upper road to Kandahar. Though less direct than the lower caravan route, it crossed the river Argandāb while the other ran through miles of waterless desert. But his panic-stricken sepoys were now completely out of hand. Fearful of being slaughtered like penned cattle, they rushed the open gateway; and so defeated the last faint hope of starting in some kind of order.

Outside the enclosure, his few persistent cavalry still charged clouds of wheeling horsemen; the gunners still stuck to their solitary gun. Two had been cut down. A third—when *ghazis* rushed it—clung to the wheels in a frantic effort to save it from capture: he himself just saved by the valour of his wounded officer, Major Blackwood, who must have returned to the fight. But even his high courage could avail only for a moment. All were lost—gun and gunner, and Blackwood also, of whom it is written 'no

better soldier or braver man ever served the Queen'.[1]

Down on the plain, panic prevailed. Sepoys and camp followers incontinently fled. Doolie bearers dropped their loads and bolted—only to be cut up. Naked men rushed from stranded doolies, fearful of being left or entrapped. All were driven by one dominant obsession—to escape, to escape, to reach Kandahar, nearly fifty miles away. Friend and foe, officer and private, surged, in dire confusion, along the *lower* caravan route; Burrows and his staff watching the exodus, in blank dismay.

By a fatality—that dogged the whole expedition—those hapless fugitives had taken, unwittingly, the desert road, waterless at this season for a full twenty-five miles. But, once started, there was no checking their headlong flight to destruction. For the Afghans were at their heels and in their midst: and Burrows himself could not desert them. It was none the less imperative that the cavalry should water their suffering horses. So, with Colonel St John, they rode off to a camping ground along the higher road, whence they could afterwards join the rest and help to protect the line of retreat.

Burrows with Major Leach, and Oliver of the 66th, achieved some sort of van and rearguard, their baggage cattle in the centre, used mainly

[1] Personal Records: Major Ashe

for sick and wounded; every jaded animal burdened with several exhausted riders. Their discarded loads were like food flung to pursuing wolves. Only the Afghan love of loot saved the force from total extinction. 'Force' it could no longer be called, that surging, sorrowful tide of broken men and animals, whose going filled the air with a pandemonium of 'shouts, oaths, bellowing of camels, curses of mule drivers, lamentation of sepoys, the savage yells of *ghazis* rising loud above all.' The soldiers among them had been under arms since daybreak; and it was now six o'clock of a blazing July evening. In two hours they had struggled little more than five miles. What of the remaining forty-four? Where and when could they hope to find a few drops of water to quench their raging thirst? Whenever they passed a village, some ran seeking it; but the seekers never returned. Among them went the gallant Gunner Subaltern, Hector Maclaine, who had done fine work with his battery that morning; and not till a full month later was he seen again . . .

While the sun glared at them, from a bleached sky, they prayed for night, for comparative cool, and darkness to hide them from the foe. But night brought its own peculiar horrors to men whose nerves were so shaken that every rock seemed a crouching Afghan, every pistol shot the sound of cannon.

At last—a village with gardens and orchards and news of a tank. Madly they rushed forward, men and animals fighting one another to reach it—a frenzied crowd. That the water proved to be filthy and putrid mattered nothing. Into the first bucket drawn up, Captain Slade, R.H.A., poured a bottle of brandy and reserved it for the wounded. But there was not nearly enough for all: and their cries—shrieking, pleading for water—gave the final touch of hideousness to a scene that no survivor would forget while he lived.

Here the cavalry joined them. Revived by a drink and brief rest, they put fresh heart, for the moment, into men almost broken by eighteen hours of fasting, fighting and marching, seeing and suffering unspeakable things . . .

Day dawned on a pitiful spectacle; a mere crowd of fugitives, dead weary, trailing through the dust; confusion increasing as men grew feebler, so that numbers fell down by the wayside.

And still the pitiless pursuit went on.

With returning light, the enemy reappeared, harassing the rearguard and the stragglers. Worse: a large body of them crowned a line of crags above the road; and, at sight of the familiar scurrying figures, the peaked turbans, cold fear invaded even the bravest hearts. Up on to those

sheer heights, they had lifted one of their lighter guns; and now shells came crashing into the helpless mass—a final torment past endurance.

It was imperative that they should be dislodged 'at all hazards'; but—could it be done? The remaining few of the 66th, alone, were still capable of so desperate a venture: and Major Oliver volunteered to make the attempt with fifty men. Impetuously they followed his bold lead; eager to avenge the death of their loved Colonel. Creeping and clambering up by hidden tracks, they gained a foothold within two hundred yards of the gun. There they crouched behind a group of rocks; then dashed out with a ringing cheer from their parched throats that startled those unsuspecting Afghans, and threw them into complete confusion. As the Berkshires fixed bayonets and came at them, 'a living line of steel', they broke and fled. The stormers dashed on: standards were seized, the gun silenced; the craggy height—deemed inaccessible—held by a few resolute British soldiers, while their comrades below struggled on almost unmolested—grateful at heart, but too exhausted in mind and body to exult over that refreshing taste of victory.

Only the cry of 'Water' could galvanize even the weakest and weariest into frantic life. It was a stream running near the road, and it offered them the first clear water they had tasted for eighteen hours.

Again the frantic struggle between man and beast—drinking, drinking, till many were so fatally distended that they fell down and died.

But a number of the infantry and most of the cavalry, refreshed by the long drink, rallied under the kindly encouragement of their officers; and, two hours later, the head of that straggling column reached, at last, the river Argandāb.

Toiling up the high embankment, they suddenly discerned, against the light, figures of turbaned mounted men—Afghans? . . .

It would be simple massacre. But they would sell their lives at a price——

The horsemen dashed forward. They were waving now—not two foot blades, but a greeting from a friendly troop of Poona horse; and the sharp revulsion from despair to relief unsteadied even the strongest.

At a fortified post, near the village of Kokerān, they found General Brooke, with more troops and the news that Kandahar was now virtually invested; the garrison already moving from cantonments to the fort within the city. So all was not yet over: but the worst lay behind them—the fear, the thirst, the pursuit.

Between the two Generals—personal friends—it was a meeting sad and pitful in the extreme: Burrows, worn out with anxiety, and fatigue, voiceless from shouting vain orders to his rabble army, was—for the moment—a crushed and

broken man. At his death the word 'Maiwand' might well be found written on his heart.

It was after two o'clock when, at last, they straggled into Kandahar fort—the sorry remnant of a force that had marched out twenty-four days earlier in health and high spirits. Out of 2,734 officers and men, 1,139 failed to answer at roll-call; and of these more than half had died in the retreat. The survivors, after that grim prelude—a disaster second to none in the story of British arms—were called upon to face the miserable, inglorious siege of Kandahar.

But from the toils of Ayub Khan and his thousands, 'one hour of Roberts' was to save them yet.

3

It was on August the 27th that the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force succeeded in flashing its first message to the ' beleaguered garrison ', after three weeks of incessant marching, urged on and upheld by the magnetic personality of its leader.

On the 21st a helio flash, from the post of Khelāt-i-Ghilzai, had given them their first news of Kandahar; news of the one ' mad, miserable sortie ' that had achieved nothing and cost the lives of eight officers, including General Brooke. More welcome was the report that Ayub Khan—alarmed at their approach—had partly raised the siege and entrenched his large army behind the rocky Paimal ridge, north of the city: a report that justified Roberts in at last allowing twenty-four hours' rest for man and beast.

On the 26th—anxious to know more—he decided to send forward Hugh Gough, with two cavalry regiments, to a point above the village of Robat, within signalling distance of Kandahar.

A forced night march of nearly thirty-five miles was a good deal to ask of over-taxed men and horses. But the beloved commander may ask what he will; and he himself, keen as any subaltern, would fain have gone with them, were it not for a sharp attack of fever, that forced him to travel in an ambulance doolie—comfortless as it was undignified for a General in command.

Before midnight the chosen regiments rode out of camp under a late-risen moon, that just enabled them to keep the track and lent a ghostly aspect to the rugged scene. Scouts and advance guard must needs keep awake and alert; but the rest—tired out with broken nights—rode mile on mile sound asleep in their saddles. All night long, the horses—weary as their riders—stumbled on, with one brief halt for a feed; and morning found them near a welcome, running stream. Thence they swerved sharply across a stretch of fiery desert, to the given point above Robat—having achieved nearly thirty-five miles in ten hours.

Through a haze of heat and dust the signallers vainly flashed their greeting; till at last a watery moon waved above Kandahar.

'Who are you?' asked the winking moon: and the answer flashed back, 'Cavalry advance guard of Kandahar Relief Force.'

Then they learnt that Ayub still remained en-

camped behind the hills; that Colonel St John and two other officers were riding out, hoping to reach Robat that evening.

Thus the Kabul-Kandahar Force—while yet afar off—had virtually achieved its aim.

Lost to the world for three weeks, it had covered close on three hundred miles, by dint of incessant marching, sleep reduced to a minimum, and one brief rest: a feat of endurance which none who shared in it were likely to forget.

During the first week—Kabul to Ghazni—they had enjoyed the varied beauty of Logar Valley; sunshine and snow, cornfield, palm grove and poplar, shadowed by inaccessible peaks and terrific crags, laced with the foam of torrents. Over the steep Zambarak Pass they had crawled like flies, between rocky cliffs where cavalry must dismount and lead their horses. On through the celebrated Sher-i-Dahān;[1] a magnificent defile, whence the advance guard could see the whole column—six miles of it from van to rear—curving and trailing, like some scaly monster, through mountain scenery as fine as any in Afghanistan.

At Ghazni, no news from Kandahar or Khelat-i-Ghilzai; no halt permitted by their tireless General, of whom it might be said—as of Henry Lawrence—whenever there was urgent

[1] Lion's mouth.

work in hand, ' he mounted the first flash of lightning that happened to be going his way.' And it was beyond Ghazni that men and animals had begun to feel the dead pull of their unresting progress: marching, always marching, at the high average of seventeen miles a day; through lifeless, waterless country; loose, hot sand burning and slipping under foot; the ' Rouse ' sounded in the small hours, camp seldom reached till early or late afternoon. On, incessantly on, as if driven by an implacable fate: thirst-tormented, half-stunned from lack of sleep; the dead, midday glare seeming to dry up the marrow in men's bones.

' If shadows could have been made saleable,' wrote one of the privileged ten thousand, ' they would have fetched any price, even the patch of shade under a horse's girth . . . I remember a ravine where it was just possible to get a little shelter by sitting bolt upright against a bank of moist clay. An English officer, a small donkey, and a low-caste native had taken refuge there together. I joined them with satisfaction . . . But the worst torment that pursued us was unquenchable thirst. Tantalus dreams of ruby-coloured claret cup, or amber cider, used to haunt my imagination till I felt I must drink something or perish.'

And the strain on the cavalry was equally severe; working well in advance, ' feeling ' for an

enemy whose absence could never be taken for granted. Covered by those watchful horsemen, in front and flank, the infantry could march in full assurance of safety, knowing that 'the eyes of the army' were very wide open.

But, whatever befel, officers and men vied with each other in their cheerful endurance of dust and drought and a blistering sun; responded instinctively to their chief's inspiring influence, his confidence in them, his blend of strict discipline with unfailing concern for their comfort and welfare. At the end of the longest hottest march, with a hundred matters pressing on his mind, he would mount a fresh horse and ride back for miles, under a blazing afternoon sun, to cheer footsore stragglers, and his hapless rearguard officer, with news that the march was nearly over.

One who tramped the whole three hundred and fifteen miles wrote afterwards: 'I can honestly assert that it could not possibly have been done except under a General, believed in by all ranks, who inspired everyone with a determination to fall down rather than give in.'

Now, on the 27th, India at last had news of them: and two days later, their tireless leader—still prostrate with fever—allowed them another twenty-four hours' rest, followed by two short

marches, that they might arrive fresh enough to take the field. He himself—though weakened by illness—insisted on riding the last few miles to meet the three Generals who came out to welcome his Force.

It was the 31st of August when they entered the city so long familiar to their thoughts. More imposing than Kabul, it rose abruptly from the open plain. Walls twenty feet high, set with seventy flanking bastions, hid all but the great dome of Ahmed Shah's tomb and the city's tower of observation. Northward—beyond those bare, serrated hills—lay the entrenched camp of Ayub Khan. An advance cavalry reconnaissance had already given Roberts the key to his dispositions; and all his own troops were eager for battle after weeks of weary marching.

It was strangely disappointing to find, in Kandahar, small trace of their own will-to-victory. The whole garrison seemed fatally demoralised by contact with the tragic remnant of Burrows' brigade, by the sense of shaken confidence that is not the least damaging effect of defeat. Bombay sepoys—fresh from that nightmare ordeal—had scared their fellows in Kandahar with wild tales of blood-thirsty *ghazis* and cruel Aimak horsemen, whose fierce steeds ate raw meat and spurted fire from their nostrils, with true tales of suffering and fear that had woefully shaken the morale of both native regiments.

Even the British officers—with a few notable exceptions—seemed dubious and unhopeful to men who had arrived confident of demolishing the invisible enemy. The less enterprising shook doubtful heads over Roberts' bold plan for immediate battle. Having twice felt the power of Ayub's arm, they held—not unjustly—a higher opinion of his strength and skill than officers who had experienced only the mass tactics of Mahomed Jān.

One of these, on the day of arrival—discussing his General's plan of action—indicated the curiously-carved range that screened Ayub's camp from view.

'By two o'clock to-morrow,' said he, 'we shall *have* that line of hills.'

His cool assurance frankly annoyed incredulous garrison officers; yet it proved to be more than justified. Not by two, but by twelve o'clock, next day, the Paimal range was in British hands.

That last night of August, the Relief Force encamped around Kandahar. Its outcrop of service tents crowned the near heights and studded the plain. A rising moon silvered groves of mango and tall palms. Night noises struck sharp on the stillness—the bark of a wild dog, the ghostly howl of jackals, the tread and whispered challenge of sentries.

Before dawn, imperious bugles called the camp to life again; and not long after 5.30 all the commanding officers assembled at Headquarters. Coffee, cigars and refreshments were served. Men stood about talking in groups till all were present. Then Roberts announced his wise decision to strike at once, and strike hard.

'I have sent for you, gentlemen,' he said, 'not to call a council of war, which implies difficulty or doubt—but to tell you my plans for the attack I purpose to make this morning.'

Those plans were at once simple and sound; a feigned threat on the Bāba Wali Pass, by Kandahar troops, under Primrose; his own first and second brigades, under MacPherson and Baker, to storm two strongly-occupied villages, beyond the cleft ridge forming Karez and Picket Hills; then to sweep round the Paimal range, taking the Afghan camp at Mazra in flank; while the cavalry, making a wider sweep, would deal with the retreating army. So cleverly had Ayub chosen his ground and concealed his men, that only Gough's admirable reconnaissance saved the British force from being led into a trap, as at Maiwand. It was a battlefield that offered many advantages and many risks; but Roberts went into action confident of a victory, that should crown his brilliant forced march, as Charasiāb had crowned his even more remarkable swoop on Kabul.

At six o'clock all troops fell in under arms: at seven, trumpets rang out the welcome breakfast call. Tents magically disappeared, parked with transport and baggage in the Sappers' garden. And none guessed that Ayub's look-out men had at once carried the news to their leader, who thereupon informed his troops that the Kabul force was off to India. They would soon be sacking Kandahar; and after that he would march them on to Delhi.

But the British decreed otherwise.

Punctually at nine o'clock, Sir Frederick Roberts threw away a half-smoked cigar, pulled out his watch, and mounted his favourite Arab. A signal to his Chief of Staff, another to General Primrose—and the deep *boom, boom* of forty-pounders told the enemy that the Kabul Force would have a few words to say about the looting of Kandahar. Roberts, with his staff, established himself on Karez Hill—wisely and promptly captured on the day of arrival. Thence he could watch Bāba Wali Pass and all the movements of his own troops, till they swung round Paimal Mountain.

While Ayub answered the forty-pounders from Bāba Wali, twelve British screw-guns opened fire on the larger village; others joined in; the artillery battle raged furiously. Under its cover, both Brigades advanced abreast; the Highlanders an impressive sight, muscular, bronzed

and bearded, pipes skirling, kilts of the Gordons swaying with an inimitable air of conscious supremacy. With them and the 2nd Gurkhas MacPherson was to 'rush without a halt' the larger village on a mound north of Karez: Baker —with his Seaforths and 2nd Sikhs—to take a wider curve and storm the village of Gundigān; all troops to join hands in the final swerve round the ridge.

The two first villages, tenaciously held, proved hard nuts to crack. First, for every inch of two miles, the men must fight their way from wall to wall, garden to garden, lane to lane; then rush the village itself; the 2nd Gurkhas leading, Gordons working round to the right. Both encountered stubborn resistance, for the place was packed with *ghazis*—Ayub's strong suit. Again and again it was 'fix bayonets'; and before 10.30 Gundi-Mullah was carried by an irresistible charge; a Highlander and a Gurkha, in friendly rivalry, racing each other for the capture of one retreating Afghan gun. The little Gurkha got there first; cut the mule-traces, cut down the drivers and jumped on the captured weapon, shouting in Hindustani, '*This* for the honour of my Regiment! Prince of Wales' 2nd Gurkhas' —thrusting his cap down the muzzle to identify his trophy.

The Afghans, discomfited, were now falling back towards Pir Paimal, followed up by the

winners. It was difficult, broken country; and on Baker's brigade—not yet through their village—fell the brunt of the fighting: across canals, through walled orchards and gardens, where the men could often see only a few yards either way; General Baker, a man of extraordinary energy, keeping full control of their every movement, dashing through hedge and ditch and enclosure, as one or other unit required attention, breathless staff officers at his heels.

Sikhs and Seaforths—led by Brownlow—pressed on unchecked; though one isolated struggle, near a village, seemingly deserted, cost the 72nd dear. As their right-hand company moved, single file, through a dry canal, its loop-holed wall suddenly spat flame and lead. Bullets hissed and whizzed in all directions; chipping trees and snapping off branches. At once several men were hit. Captain Frome fell mortally wounded. Yet, perforce, they must press on, the subaltern leading. And suddenly they were cheered by the sight of their Colonel, dismounted, coming to seek and encourage them in their dilemma.

Tall and conspicuous Brownlow stood there, bidding them 'rush' the wall and fire into the loopholes, when a rattling volley drowned his voice, and a chance bullet struck him in the neck.

With a deep groan he fell sideways. His subaltern and orderly ran to help him; but with-

out a sign of pain or struggle, his spirit passed, while they kneeled there supporting him—hardly able to believe that the man, loved and honoured by every soldier in the regiment, in the whole force, lay dead beside them—he who had seemed bullet-proof on the slopes of Asmai. Yet even while the angry bitterness of war raged in the hearts of his men, they knew that he had died as he would have wished to do, leading them to assured victory; had left them, for heritage, the abiding memory of a very brave soldier and a fine gentleman.

Still half-incredulous, they saw him carried away, unprotesting, from his last fight on earth. And they must press on, though their heart-sickening loss would rob victory of half its triumph: on, in the teeth of enemy assaults and gun-fire from the heights, threading their dangerous way through more lanes and loop-holed walls, till they rounded the shoulder of Paimal ridge. And a fine sight it was when the united brigades —Highlanders, Gurkhas and Sikhs—swept resistlessly up the bare gorge to take Ayub Khan in flank and wipe out the stain of that inglorious 27th of July.

Paimal village they captured by a series of rushes; and beyond it, in a dip between two hills, Ayub's virtually defeated army made its final stand. Here were two camps of twenty or thirty tents, their guns posted behind a water-cut twelve

feet deep that served for entrenchment. Both British brigades were to advance in line for the attack. But MacPherson's troops had forced the pace; and Major White—always in the van—found himself and his leading companies faced by thousands of irregulars, determined to show fight. Though the Pioneers came running up on their left, they were few against many. Clearly it was a case of 'fix bayonets'—a form of persuasion to which Afghans invariably succumbed.

Major White—riding along a shallow channel where his men lay under cover—called out to them, in perfect confidence, 'Highlanders, will you follow me if I give you a lead for those guns, just to finish them?'

His answer was a ringing cheer, as his Gordons sprang up and dashed across the open, bayonets gleaming, pipers skirling 'The Slogan'; White riding serenely ahead, drawing on himself a terrific fire from the guns and some four hundred rifles on the hill.

Forty men of the first company fell, killed or wounded; and Major White, still well ahead, sprang alone into the water-course. Finding his charger unable to climb the steep bank, he sat there quietly, awaiting his men, watching the enemy, who were firing almost into his face; aiming ill and missing him through sheer excitement at having got him in a trap. But he whose *kismet* is good rides unharmed; and, as his men

came leaping into the water, he found a means of scrambling up the bank.

After all that, they arrived to find guns deserted and double-shotted; the traces cut by gunners who had mounted the mules to speed their flight. Both camps were empty: the rout complete.

The swiftness and daring of that brilliant final charge must have astonished not only the Afghans, but also General Roberts, who had ridden on, with his reserve brigade, and seen all from the crest of the ridge. The honours of the fight went mainly to the infantry—Queen of Battles. And as camp after camp came into view, all unstruck and unoccupied, they gloried in the full revelation of victory: 'an hour of triumph—of retribution and recovery—worth a year of toil.' [1]

The far side of Bāba Wali was strewn with deserted guns, and equipage, grain and forage—every sign of hasty flight. In Ayub's main camp—a mile-long city of tents—it was much the same story. His mighty army had dissolved—in true Afghan fashion. Only the dead remained, on the hillside and in nullahs, testifying to heavy losses; even as the prevailing disorder testified to precipitate flight. Here were arms and ammunition, Korans and English tinned meats, helmets and carpets, and many strange instruments. Not

[1] C. G. Robertson.

least here were thirty pieces of cannon, including the British guns taken at Maiwand — the General's rightful trophies, preserved to this day.

In Ayub's personal tent—vast and richly carpeted—a couch of damask, overlaid with leopard skins, was curtained with embroidered shawls. Costly weapons hung on hooks round the many poles. Pipes of all kinds, a mandolin and Persian books, handsome chogas and *puggris* were flung about in wild disorder. Prince Charlie, wise in time, must have fled directly Paimal ridge was turned, leaving the final stand to *ghazis* and irregulars; thus neatly slipping through the net laid for him by the Cavalry brigade, whose wide detour over difficult ground had lost them the most desired trophy of the day.

In camp, one tragic discovery marked that hour of triumph. About forty yards from Ayub's own tent lay the dead body of Hector Maclaine, the gallant Gunner subaltern of Maiwand, who had gone aside seeking water, and had never returned. For five weeks he and several Belooch sepoys had been held prisoners—possibly with a view to ransom. Now he lay there, his throat deeply cut, his body still warm when they found him. Beside him lay a dead sepoy shot through the head; and the story told by those who survived was that Ayub—in his hurried flight—had left verbal orders forbidding the prisoners to be killed. But as the English approached their guard dragged

them all out, had shot one sepoy, murdered Maclaine, and bolted, leaving the rest unharmed. The characteristic cruelty of it, when release was at hand, bitterly angered humane Englishmen, who knew that Ayub could have ensured Maclaine's safety by leaving him with Kazzilbash cavalry. But neither anger nor horror could dim their satisfaction over a disgrace and disaster wiped out, the guns regained, the prestige of British arms restored by the swiftness and completeness of their triumph.

'In fine, not to have been present at Bāba Wali'—wrote the officer who had fought his first action at victorious Peiwar Kotal—'would have meant missing the fight nearest to a pitched battle that the crop of dragons' teeth produced in Afghanistan. Peiwar Kotal was a fortress surprised by a tiny storming party; Charasiāb was won with a brigade; at Kabul the enemy wisely avoided a general engagement. . . . But at Kandahar you have all the elements of a great tableau in war. In darkest shadow the reverse to British arms, the like of which was never known in India, followed by weeks of uncertainty regarding Kandahar. . . . Then the bright lights of the picture: the magnificent march of the Kabul Field Force and the skilled movement of Ayub Khan to a position commanding the Kabul and Herāt roads; the arrival of the Army of the North; the victory that scattered the southern

Afghans like sheep, that stripped their leader of his cannon and his laurels. . . . The future has high honours in store for our noble leader . . . but will he ever taste a sweeter triumph than on the field of victory? A *rôle* which began bravely with Peiwar Kotal, ended most gloriously with Kandahar; and as Sir Frederick Roberts rode down the line of troops, with a kindly word for all, he was greeted with a ringing cheer, taken up by the Bombay regiments as he rode back from the famous Bāba Wali Pass.'[1]

How deeply he himself was moved on that greatest of all his Afghan great occasions, may best be told in his own simple phrases written from a full heart: 'Utterly exhausted as I was from a hard day's work and . . . my late illness, the cheers with which I was greeted as I rode into Ayub Khan's camp, and viewed the dead bodies of my gallant soldiers, nearly unmanned me. It was with a very big lump in my throat that I managed to say a few words of thanks to each corps'.

Returning to Kandahar, he flung himself on his bed, worn out with illness, with weeks of living at high pressure in mind and body, with the sheer relief of reaction from strain. But after an hour's rest he roused himself to write out his unadorned soldierly despatch that at once told nothing and told all.

[1] C. G. Robertson.

After twelve years of strenuous Indian service, his imperative need was for rest, for long leave and the life-giving air of England; meantime he was rightly elated—weariness or no—by telegrams from the Queen, the new Viceroy and the Duke of Cambridge; by intimation of coming rewards for his services: a G.C.B. and the prospect of returning to India as Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army.

Before leaving Kandahar, he had the satisfaction of presenting further good conduct medals to the two Highland regiments that had so gallantly served him and to the men of the 5th Gurkhas—Highlanders themselves, from the mountains of Nepal.

It was a scene to be remembered not only by the regiments he delighted to honour: the whole Kandahar garrison drawn up on three sides of a square; bands playing, the general salute given as Roberts rode up on his favourite charger, Vonolel—afterwards decorated, by Royal permission, with Kabul medal and Kandahar star.

In giving the decorations, he added his own tribute to the conduct of both regiments: 'I can say from my experience as a soldier, that no men with whom I have ever served, have better merited these rewards. . . . I can but hope that it may be my fortune to have such good soldiers by my side next time I go into action. . . . Yes! You beat the Afghans at Kabul, you have

beaten them at Kandahar. . . . The very last troops they will ever wish to meet again in the field are Highlanders and Gurkhas. You have made for yourselves a name in this country; and as you will not be forgotten in Afghanistan, so you may rest assured you will never be forgotten by me.'

One more glimpse he was to have, some five weeks later, of the officers and men he had commanded and cared for and worked unsparingly for nearly two years.

On the 12th of October he left Quetta for Simla and his delayed leave Home. As he rode through the Bolān Pass he overtook a long familiar line of marching troops; familiar, not only as troops, but as men—nearly all the regiments of the Kabul Field Force marching down to the frontier terminus, whence the new railway would carry them to India.

Heartily they must have greeted him; and, at parting, the band of each corps played 'Auld Lang Syne'—poignant strains that ever afterwards brought to mind his last sight of them all.

'I fancy myself'—he wrote, looking back many years—'crossing and re-crossing the river that winds through the Pass. I hear the martial beat of drums and plaintive music of the pipes, I see Riflemen and Gurkhas, Highlanders and Sikhs, guns and horses, camels and mules, the

endless following of an Indian army winding through the narrow gorges or over the interminable boulders': a ghostly army, ever marching, never arriving—as his own victorious army had once arrived, after tramping through bitter nights and blazing days, from Kabul to Kandahar.

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INDEX

A

Abdulla, Jān, 21, 28
Abdur Rahmān Khan, 144, 145, 148
Adams, Rev. J., V.C., 37, 108
Ashe, Major (Personal Records), 152, 163
Auckland, Lord, 16
Ayub Khan, 143, 147, 148, 151, 153, 169, 183

B

Baker, General, 79, 85, 87, 116, 176, 179
Battye, Major Wigram, 46
12th Bengal Cavalry, 128
14th Bengal Lancers, 104, 106, 136
Blackwood, Major, 154, 157–159, 162
Bright, General, 137
Brooke, General, 167, 169
Browne, General Sir Sam, V.C., 32, 39, 40, 76
Brownlow, Colonel, 109, 113, 118, 179
Burnes, Alexander, 16
Burrows, General, 146, 150, 151, 154, 162, 167

C

Cavagnari, Major Pierre Louis Napoleon, C.S.I., 28, 29, 30, 32, 44, 45, 46, 51, 55, 60, 63, 64
Clarke, Colonel, 115, 128

D

Daoud Shah, General, 65, 79, 94, 101
Dōst Mahomed Khan (Amir-i-Kabir), 16, 17
Durand, Mortimer, 77, 80, 92, 106

F

Faiz Mahomed, 29, 30
Frome, Captain, 179

G

Galbraith, Colonel, 155, 156, 159, 160
Gough, Captain, 105
Gough, General Hugh, 106, 109, 169
Gough, Brig.-General Charles, 121, 125, 126, 127, 134
Guides, The, 29, 46, 65, 68, 71, 90, 95, 110, 113, 118, 133, 136
Green, Major, 129
Griffin, Lepel, 144, 145
Gurkhas, 35, 38, 85, 93, 113, 119, 178, 180, 186

H

Hamilton, Walter Pollock, V.C., 46, 47, 53, 64, 68, 69, 70
Hanna, Colonel H. B. (quotations from), 84, 87, 132
Highlanders, 35, 38, 83, 85, 86, 107, 109, 112, 113, 134, 177, 180, 186
Holdich, Captain, R.E., 117, 118
Hudson, Colonel, 126, 127

J

Jacob's Rifles, 154, 158, 160
Jenkins, Colonel, 29, 110, 115
Jenkyns, 45, 46, 67, 69
Jewand Singh, 71, 72

K

KABUL EMBASSY DISASTER, 58-72
Kabul-Kandahar Field Force, 169, 170, 171, 175, 184, 187
Kelly, Dr., 46, 69
Kennedy, Sir Michael, 105
Kuram Field Force, 32, 42, 76

L

9th LANCERS, 104, 106, 136
Lawrence John, 18, 48
Lytton, Lord, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 77, 141

M

MACGREGOR, COLONEL, 95, 101, 110, 124
Maclaine, Gunner Subaltern Hector, 164, 183
McPherson, General, 103, 109, 113, 116, 119, 176, 178
Mahomed Jān, 100, 102, 104, 135, 141
Maiwand, 150–168
Massy, General, 103, 104, 124, 135
Mushk-i-Alum, 99, 100, 130, 132

N

NAKSHBAND KHAN, RESSALDAR-MAJOR, 54, 55
Northbrook, Lord, 19, 20

O

OLIVER, MAJOR, 159, 161, 166
Osborne, R.H A., 157

P

PALMER, GENERAL, 38
Pelly, Sir Lewis, 22
Pollock, 18
Primrose, General, 146, 150, 176, 177
Punjab Cavalry, 135, 136
Punjab Infantry, 35, 36, 37, 85, 115

Q

QUEEN VICTORIA, 22

R

ROBERTS, MAJOR FREDERICK, R A., V C , C.B. Campaign against Afghans round Kuram Valley 32-39, awarded K.C.B. 42, hears of Kabul tragedy 75, "Swoop on Kabul" 81-87, enters Kabul 93, at Kabul 93-119, courage and bearing in defeat 119, besieged in Kabul 119-135, victory 136, commanding the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force 169-186, departure for home 187-188
Robertson, C. G. (quotations from), 39, 182, 185

S

ST. JOHN, COLONEL, 163, 171
Salisbury, Lord, 19, 31
72nd, (Seaforths), 93, 107, 118
Shah Shujah, 16, 17
Sher Ali, 18, 19, 20, 22, 27, 28, 31, 40
Shere Ali 143, 150
Sikhs, 85, 89, 90, 112, 178, 180
Slade, Captain, 165
66th Battalion (The Berkshires), 154, 155, 159, 166
Spens, Captain, 116
Stewart, Sir Donald, 32, 39, 76, 145, 147

V

VOUSDEN, CAPTAIN, V.C., 115.

W

WHITE, MAJOR, 85, 86, 87, 181

Y

YAKUB KHAN (AMIR), 19, 41, 42, 45, 60, 61, 65, 77, 79, 80, 91
Younghusband, Colonel George (quotations from) 47